LEOPOLD METHOD

INTELLIGENT, INSIGHTFUL FOOTBALL ANALYSIS



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EDITORIAL

IN MAY 2015, FOOTBALL FEDERATION AUSTRALIA CHIEF EXECUTIVE David Gallop announced an ambitious vision for the game. The *Whole of Football Plan* is a 20-year strategic document that is highly aspirational in its objectives with the aim for 'football to be the largest and most popular sport in Australia'. Gallop is hoping to achieve this by riding the wave of anticipated national population growth, doubling the number of male and female players and converting 75% of junior participants into fans of the A-League. By achieving these targets it is hoped that it will address the central issue that has continually plagued football in Australia – the lack of money.

All of football's plans and dreams will not be achieved unless there are adequate funds to finance it. The discussion of money reared its ugly head as collective bargaining negotiations between Professional Footballers Australia and the governing body broke down this year. Caught in the crosshairs were the Matildas, who decided to cancel their September tour to the United States in an effort to improve their poor remuneration. On one side is FFA, who claim to only have a finite amount of resources to spend, and on the other side are the female players who only want what they feel is fair.

Pete Smith interviews former Matildas on the personal sacrifices they made, and the stereotypes they had to overcome,

just to play the sport. Many of the challenges they faced still remain today. The current Matildas may never be rightly remunerated for their work, but this stand is not only about their plight, it is about setting up full-time professional pathways for women footballers in the future.

This year has not been without its controversies. Failed mining magnate Nathan Tinkler was stripped of his Newcastle Jets licence as he placed the club into voluntary administration. As the club begins the rebuilding process under the administration of FFA, it is a timely reminder of the rich football history of the Hunter region as told by historian, Philip Mosely, and its importance to football in this country.

John Stensholt explains how the global financial crisis proved to be a tumultuous time for the fledgling competition. Some of the owners were forced to hand over their licences, clubs were closed and bids never got off the ground. Vince Rugari examines the same period through the failed expansion clubs of North Queensland Fury and Gold Coast United. There are some key lessons to be learned from these stories as the game plans for its next period of expansion.

This period of upheaval forced a cash-strapped FFA to find short-term fixes. China's insatiable demand for iron ore for its booming economy created a new wave of mining magnates. As result, the A-League would see cashed-up owners from this industry – Clive Palmer (Gold Coast United), Tinkler and the Bakrie Group (Brisbane Roar) – purchasing A-League clubs. As commodity prices fell, both Tinkler and Bakrie Group's revenue struggled to service their debt level. During the last off season, Brisbane Roar were in the news as the Bakrie Group struggled to pay player and staff wages on time, as well as staving off creditors who were calling in their debts.

John Davidson's biographical account of a man who had been a key figure in the A-League, Lyall Gorman, also provides a narrative

of the A-League's peaks and troughs. Gorman successfully navigated the launch of Central Coast Mariners in the competition's smallest market. FFA noted this success as it appointed him to be in charge of the A-League during its darkest period. His third, but not necessarily his final, stanza in football was the successful birth of Western Sydney Wanderers which brought on another period of growth for the competition.

Learning from mistakes and celebrating football's successes is part of the process in embracing our past. Ian Syson argues that football has 'been present at key moments in Australian history yet the broader culture and the game itself simply do not remember'. Moves have been made to correct this wrong. The WOFP calls for the establishment of a Football Museum as a means of establishing 'a strong connection between Football's present and its past'. For the first time, National Soccer League statistics will be combined with the A-League.

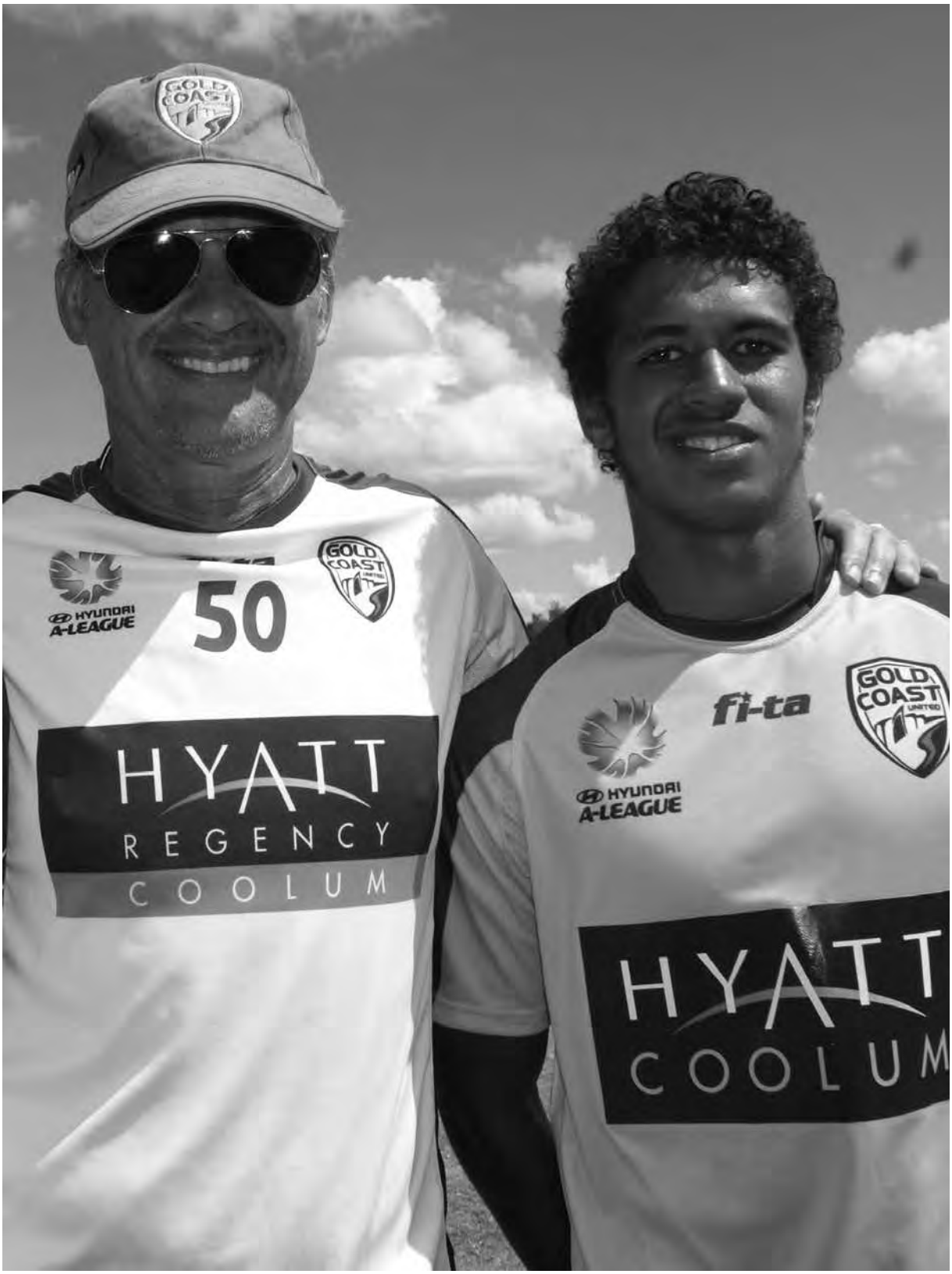
But even in the A-League's short history it has struggled with recognising the accomplishments of those who have contributed to the competition's growth. The so-called 'tactical revolution' of the A-League has been marked by coach Ange Postecoglou's success with Brisbane Roar. Postecoglou proved that a proactive possession-based game can be played in Australia, but as Kate Cohen tells, what has largely been forgotten is Czech coach Vitezslav Lavicka's role in improving the tactical and professional standards of the A-League. This is another example of how *Leopold Method*, in a small way, can help with telling Australia's football narrative by bringing these forgotten stories back into people's minds.

After a decade of the A-League, football in Australia is at a crossroads. FFA's plans for the next 20 years are highly ambitious, but in the current climate many people within football are cynical, and given football's past, they have every right to be concerned. So far FFA's tenure has come with great highs and many lows. As

with any new venture this is to be expected. What is required over the next two decades is sustained growth, with less short-term fixes that cause volatility. If FFA get this right it will provide the financial windfalls this game so richly deserves.

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THE LESSONS OF A-LEAGUE EXPANSION

VINCE RUGARI

'I KNOW EXACTLY,' SAYS MIRON BLEIBERG. 'I CAN PUT YOUR FINGER on the moment it all started to go downhill.' Bleiberg is about to explain precisely what triggered the spectacular demise of Gold Coast United, one of the sorriest episodes in A-League history. Like every other false dawn in Australian football, this one held incredible promise – a bottomless pit of money, one of the fastest growing regions in the country and an expanded competition ready to make an almighty splash.

Brought in alongside North Queensland Fury for the 2009–10 season, for a while Gold Coast United was the most exciting thing to ever happen to the A-League. Instead, they became one of the most embarrassing, with the club's final days dovetailing into a farcical war between owner Clive Palmer and fellow billionaire, FFA chairman Frank Lowy. As Gold Coast's co-founder, inaugural coach and public face, Bleiberg saw it unfold all the way through.

'There was a meeting of owners in Sydney which was preceding the Australia versus Uzbekistan World Cup qualifier,' he says. April Fool's Day, 2009, at ANZ Stadium – more than four months before United's highly-anticipated A-League debut.

'I remember it very vividly because me and Clive flew in the private jet to Sydney. Two things happened. First, I was in

the cockpit and the pilot let me land the aeroplane. That's why I remember; it was like playing a computer game. And the second thing I remember is we parked our aeroplane in the Sydney airport in the private section right next to the plane of the Uzbekistan team. Wing to wing with the opposition.'

Bleiberg and Palmer left the airport for their lavish hotel, where the former stayed behind as the latter went off to meet with the other A-League club chairman to discuss the business of the day. As soon as Palmer returned, Bleiberg could sense a change in his mood.

'He didn't like what he heard there. He said, "I don't like what I see and I don't want to continue." He referred to Frank Lowy. He was so upset that you know what happened? We came to watch the game but he said, "You go, I'm staying in the hotel. I've had enough of soccer." I wasn't in this meeting, I didn't ask and it's not my business. But I know if the guy travelled to come to watch the Socceroos and after this meeting he didn't want to know about it anymore, I can assume something happened. So the chauffeured limousine came to take me to the game by myself. It was raining, the chauffeur opened the umbrella and I went in. He treated me like Clive but Clive wasn't there, I was the Clive.'

For the record, Australia won 2-1, thanks to goals from Josh Kennedy and Harry Kewell. 'After the game, the chauffeured limousine came again with the umbrella so I don't get wet, god forbid. And from then onwards it was an ongoing battle between the two giants. Clive lost his enthusiasm and his interest.'

The A-League's first attempt at expansion was a dismal failure – that much is accepted. But as FFA contemplates adding two new teams to boost the next broadcast rights deal in 2017, understanding the many and varied reasons why it was a failure has never been more important. Where these two new teams come from and how FFA manages their creation loom as some of the most important decisions in the competition's short history and will set up the league for the next decade.

The wild success of the Western Sydney Wanderers, which

replaced Gold Coast United from the 2012–13 season, suggests FFA has perhaps heeded a few key lessons from the first wave of expansion. But there are dozens of others it must keep at front of mind. Palmer's now-infamous temperament represents one of them – that certain billionaires require certain kinds of treatment.

Up in Townsville, golf course entrepreneur Don Matheson's North Queensland Fury was readying for their A-League entry. It was always a little strange that of all the places FFA could have turned to first, they chose Townsville and the Gold Coast – two regions which have never traditionally identified with the round-ball game.

Neither had a presence in the National Soccer League, although some locals wonder what could have been were it not for the collapse of the first iteration of the Queensland State League, which included teams from Townsville, the Gold Coast, Mareeba, Rockhampton and Bundaberg, in addition to the strongest clubs from the south-east. When that competition ceased operations in 1982 after just four seasons, Brisbane's first division defaulted back to being Queensland's first division, and the regions suffered in silence for years afterwards, completely excluded from the elite level. With a total population of around 160,000 – much less than the football support base of 250,000 recommended by the Professional Footballers Association in their 2002 proposal for what an elite national league should look like – Townsville in particular was seen as a risky proposition.

In the context of Australia's bid to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup, however, the reasons became clearer. FFA was keen to show FIFA that football was growing into new areas. The frontier markets of North Queensland and the Gold Coast both ticked that box, sexing up the bid with their respective tropical and beachside appeal. Plus, it was seen as vital to have clubs in all of the cities that would play host to World Cup games, and with Townsville's Dairy Farmers Stadium and Gold Coast's Metricon Stadium included in

the bid, they held a strategic importance.

The A-League was only four seasons old when the Fury and United entered the competition and many cautioned that the expansion process was rushed in FFA's eagerness to impress the global body. Nothing, however, was going to stop a free-spending Matheson, who showed his ambition by signing Liverpool icon Robbie Fowler, one of the biggest names to hit the competition at the time.

The Fury will forever be intrinsically linked with FFA's World Cup bid. Millions of hearts in Australia sunk when Qatar was revealed as hosts for the 2022 World Cup, but the announcement was taken hardest of all in Townsville, where the locals had an additional interest in the outcome. It didn't take long in their very first season for Matheson, the Fury chairman, to realise his pockets didn't run as deep as he thought they did.

When his consortium ran out of money, FFA took over control. Keen to avoid any negative headlines in the thick of the race for the World Cup, FFA decided to fund the Fury in its second season. Had the World Cup bid been successful, FFA may well have opted to keep North Queensland alive. But when Lowy's long-held dream of bringing the world's biggest sporting extravaganza to Australia was shattered, the writing was on the wall. There was an air of morbid inevitability of the visit to Townsville of then-chief executive Ben Buckley to Townsville in March 2011, when he confirmed the Fury would be no more.

'The drivers were all wrong,' former A-League head Archie Fraser told *Leopold Method*. The licences were already awarded to Gold Coast and North Queensland by the time he joined FFA in March 2009, but Fraser was one of the key figures throughout the course of the A-League's first attempt at expansion. 'It was probably to try and get some dots on the map that correlated with what the bid document was going to look like. When you start out with an objective in mind which is not the objective you're telling everybody, it's pretty difficult to get the right outcomes.'

The Fury's closure was met with an explosive reaction in

Townsville, with acting mayor David Crisafulli claiming North Queensland was just a pawn in a much bigger game. 'It seemed that FFA's focus was on the larger bid and in my mind it seemed like we were part of regional proponent of the World Cup bid rather than a regional component for the league,' he said at the time.

When the financial plight of both expansion clubs became apparent, Fraser was thrust into a hands-on role in Queensland, effectively tasked with salvaging something from the smouldering wreckage. Fraser was chief executive officer of AFL club St Kilda before joining FFA. 'Because I'd come from running a football club, I knew the numbers off by heart really,' he said. 'The first time I looked at Townsville's budget, I could see, in my view, a $3.5 million dollar black hole in the budget they had put forward and had effectively been signed off on. Their projections for crowds, corporates, merchandise – all these numbers were equal with a mid-range AFL club in the market of a city of three million people. You've got 120,000 in Townsville and it's not going to stack up.'

Fraser took Matheson out for dinner early in the Fury's first season to explain the situation and break it to him that he was in for a multi-million dollar loss, and with no sign of things getting any better. 'Don probably didn't believe it initially,' Fraser said. 'Like a lot of new owners who come into football, they get besotted by it all. When you become a football owner, you get the stage. You get the front page and back page. A lot become liniment sniffers and as a result their brains disappear and they start making decisions based on emotion.'

In stark contrast to North Queensland's predicament, the Gold Coast was emerging as the holy grail for franchise sport in Australia. Once a mere collection of holiday destinations for Brisbane's rich, by the mid-2000s it was one of the fastest growing parts of the country and had developed into a genuine city in its own standing.

Projections show that by 2026, the glitter strip will be home to 750,000 people. Naturally, every code has attempted to carve

out their share. Rugby league's Gold Coast Titans entered the NRL in 2007 and for a while looked like they would succeed where the Giants, Gladiators, Seagulls and Chargers previously failed. Shortly afterwards the AFL decided to make inroads, redeveloping the Carrara sporting precinct into Metricon Stadium as a new home for the Gold Coast Suns, who began play in 2011.

Palmer's interest in funding an A-League team presented football with the chance to at least get a one-year jump on the AFL in such a vital market. Palmer himself was an opportunity for Australian football to have its own version of Roman Abramovich. The eccentric mining tycoon wanted only the best for Gold Coast United, promising to open his cheque book to sign a world-class marquee player and offering his private jet for exclusive use by the team.

The club's recruitment drive was launched with the release of a glossy brochure that sold the benefits of life on the Gold Coast to prospective players. 'People who know me and know what I do will tell you I don't get involved in many things that aren't successful and our plan is to make Gold Coast United the top club in Australia,' Palmer wrote in the brochure. 'We only have such an attitude because all of us involved at Gold Coast United have, in our various careers, been winners.'

Palmer's bid rose from the ashes of a consortium known as Gold Coast Galaxy, headed by Walter Bugno, the former Sydney FC chairman who had relocated to Queensland. A mutual acquaintance, player agent Lou Sticca, introduced Bugno to Bleiberg, who had recently resigned as coach of Brisbane Roar. The Galaxy had the backing of several local property kingpins but the impact of the global financial crisis in 2008, which particularly cruelled the Gold Coast, meant most of the money men had to back out. With the Galaxy on shaky ground it appeared the region's A-League ambitions would have to be put on hold – until Bleiberg received a phone call out of the blue from Geoff Smith, one of Palmer's most trusted confidants.

'He told me, "Look, are you Miron Bleiberg the football

coach?" I said yes,' Bleiberg recalls. '"Are you the guy who wanted to start a team on the Gold Coast?" I said yes. He said, "Look, I will introduce you to Clive Palmer, he might be interested. Prepare yourself, because he's got a short attention span. You've got your 10 minutes of glory, either you make it or you don't make it."'

Unbeknownst to either of them, Palmer and Bleiberg had actually lived for years on the same street, only a few houses apart, in affluent southern Brisbane suburb Fig Tree Pocket. In fact, Palmer's son was a frequent visitor to Bleiberg's house – he went to school with Bleiberg's son, and often came over for poker nights. Those connections meant the ice was quickly broken, and Bleiberg and Palmer became close friends. Winning the famously temperamental Palmer's trust is no mean feat. 'Clive can be extremely charming and extremely volatile in a short space of time,' Bleiberg said. 'But he is also loyal, and very generous. If you know how to play your cards right you are on his good side and that's what happened with me.'

To the Gold Coast football community at large, the sudden arrival of an A-League team was welcomed, but unexpected. 'It was a bombshell,' supporter Nathan Mulhearn told *Leopold Method*. Mulhearn was one of that hardy bunch of diehard Gold Coast United fans who would turn up and hear the echoes of their own chants in an empty Skilled Park every week. In the club's dying days, he became heavily involved in the failed campaign headed by businessman Geoffrey Schuhkraft to keep the A-League licence on the Gold Coast.

Having grown up watching his father play local football before embarking on his own amateur career, as much as he craved it, Mulhearn knew deep down the tourist strip wasn't quite mature enough to jump into the big league. 'Yeah, Miron had been looking to try and get some people involved … but I just didn't think the groundwork had been done as far as any research or feasibility studies or anything,' he said. 'I suppose those fears were allayed at the time when it was Clive Palmer, with an unlimited supply of money to be able to make it work. Optimism came out of that.'

Palmer's largesse was front and centre in the club's early days. His press conferences were events in themselves, and he added to the theatre by regularly arriving via helicopter. Palmer knew next to nothing about football, but he had plenty of ambition. For instance, the story of how he came up with the club's name: 'The only team Clive knew about was Manchester United,' Bleiberg said. 'He didn't know any other name. He said, "What's the best team in the world, Manchester United? OK, we are Gold Coast United."'

Gold Coast pulled off a huge coup in their hunt for a marquee player, securing Jason Culina, who was 28 at the time and at the peak of his powers. But it had to be explained to an overexcited Palmer that it wasn't quite as simple as just throwing money at his preferred options, David Beckham and Harry Kewell. Bleiberg said he was essentially handed carte blanche to put together the entire club, bar one appointment – Clive Mensink, Palmer's nephew, who was made chief executive officer.

Bleiberg remembers United's formative days as 'the best part'. 'You know why? He told me, "Listen, OK, we'll go ahead. How much money do you need?" And I told him how much, we're talking seven figures. And that's it. Go ahead and do it. Everything was me, me and myself. It was a pleasure because it allowed me to combine my experience in my soccer knowledge, my business knowledge and my business talent.'

However, the mood around the club darkened after Palmer's first run-in with Lowy. With his initial wide-eyed enthusiasm now replaced by a desire to get back at Lowy, his purse strings also tightened. Palmer once gathered the playing group for a meeting early in their second season to assure them that, despite speculation about him closing the club, their contracts would be honoured since his company Mineralogy had just made a multi-million dollar profit. Palmer had already flaunted his wealth by driving to the meeting in a magnificent, brand new pearl blue Ferrari. However, in almost the same breath, he informed the

players that due to budgetary restraints, the club had decided it would no longer employ a physiotherapist. They laughed.

He still had money to burn, but his heart was no longer set on burning it on football. In Gold Coast's second season, Palmer decided to only offer players one-year contracts. That meant most of the stellar squad Bleiberg had assembled, including Shane Smeltz, Zenon Caravella, Bruce Djite and Bas van den Brink, took up offers elsewhere. On the rare occasion the club went out into the community, their engagement programs were more like box-ticking exercises than the investments that smart clubs see them as today.

Fans began to see through the ruse. Palmer had promised to spare no expense with Gold Coast United but by cutting costs at every turn, he contradicted the club's original message and lost the trust and faith of many locals. 'From a supporter's point of view it was, why are we cutting costs? We'd been told that Clive had an endless pit he could spend on private jets and what have you,' Mulhearn said.

Bleiberg claims Palmer's financial scything went so far that at the end of the 2010–11 campaign, Gold Coast United actually turned down qualification for the 2012 AFC Champions League. Brisbane Roar and Central Coast Mariners won direct passage to Asia that season, while third-placed Adelaide United earned a spot in the group stages after winning a qualifying play-off against Indonesia's Persipura Jayapura. Gold Coast finished fourth on the ladder but third in the finals series, losing the preliminary final to Central Coast Mariners courtesy of a lucky late goal to Adam Kwasnik. According to Bleiberg, Adelaide did so only because Gold Coast United chose not to.

'Everybody hides it, but that's the truth,' he said. 'Hardly anybody noticed, Clive wrote a letter that we are not ready, not prepared, and that's it. His business is in Asia, the whole idea about him starting a soccer team was that we would go and play in Asia. When the opportunity came he was so upset with FFA he didn't want to go. You have to fill the paperwork and sign the

contract with AFC and we didn't do it.'

The introduction of the infamous 'crowd cap' a mere 13 rounds into Gold Coast United's first season was the killer blow. Just 2,616 people watched United fall 2-0 to North Queensland Fury at Skilled Park on the first night it was enforced, and the images of three completely barren stands were hugely damaging to the club and to the A-League. Gold Coast had averaged 5,651 across their first five home games – much less than expected, and well under the figure required to break even. Their stadium deal was crippling, and was entered into with little guidance from FFA.

'You'd just get eaten up by Stadiums Queensland if you walk in and try and do and agreement and you really don't know what you're signing up for,' Fraser said. 'They put numbers to you and all of a sudden … your costs are running on a user-pays basis for all these stadiums, and Queensland is the most expensive of anywhere.'

Palmer was facing a loss of approximately $100,000 per match but was able to save this money by capping attendances at 5,000 and opening only one stand, significantly reducing staffing costs, allowing them to avoid a state government transport levy and for games to proceed without an expensive traffic management plan. In real terms, it was a soft cap, not a hard cap. That meant if a crowd of 5,001 turned up, the last one wouldn't be turned away.

But with the amount of damage it did to the club's image, there was never any danger of that many people coming to a Gold Coast United match ever again. The notion that Palmer, a billionaire, was penny-pinching to the extent that he wanted less people at games, not more, was not going to fly. The *Courier-Mail* and the *Gold Coast Bulletin* were relentless in their criticism of the move, but they were 'unfair', according to Bleiberg. '[Palmer] made a decision everyone would have done with their own money but he was portrayed like a criminal who's killing soccer,' he said.

Palmer defended the arrangement in a lengthy statement that, years later, comes off as prophetic about some of the debate that surrounds the structure of the A-League. 'Enough is enough when

it comes to pointing fingers at Gold Coast United for its perceived lack of community involvement and poor crowd figures. It is important, if we are to move forward as a club, that people deal with reality, not perception … People need to realise that is where the game is at. Once people accept that 5,000 is not an unrealistic crowd figure for an A-League team on the Gold Coast, the easier it will be to move forward on strategies to increase the crowd figures.'

But there was no way for Palmer to defend what supporters and the FFA saw as indefensible. 'When he did that and did it without any consultation it was clear that he'd had some one-on-ones with Lowy before that,' Fraser said, 'and Lowy's view was that he could afford it – "I told you this wasn't going to be a smooth run, pull your heads in and do what I tell you", that type of thing. I think once Clive started getting talked to like the other owners, he just said "stuff it, I'll show you." The perception was he was damaging football so more people stayed away.'

In Townsville, things were equally dire behind the scenes. Like Gold Coast, the Fury's inaugural chief executive Dean Hassell didn't come from a football background. Unlike Gold Coast, there was nobody on staff as experienced in the game as Bleiberg to appropriately set up the club. Some puzzling names were thrown up as marquee options before Fowler was signed. The first was Cassio, the Adelaide United fullback – an excellent player, but certainly not a marquee by any definition.

The Brazilian was reportedly very interested in moving north but the day after he was linked with the Fury, he re-signed with the Reds. Matheson said it felt like a 'punch in the mouth'. Then defender Jade North actually signed a three-year marquee deal but backed out a month later so he could take up a lucrative contract with K-League outfit Incheon United. Three days earlier, North had told the press he had no interest in moving to South Korea.

The rest of North Queensland's inaugural squad was put together in the same haphazard way – many recruits were either

unwanted by their former clubs or, like the injury-cursed Jacob Timpano, discards for a reason. Early results, as predicted, were poor, with the Fury only tasting victory once in their first 11 games.

Drama struck right in the middle of that run. Matheson had started as one of a group of owners but in September 2009 had bought out the stake held by Mitch and Blair Burke, the brothers behind Rockhampton-based recruitment agency Minniecon and Burke. The Burkes were football-mad, having both been involved at board level with Queensland State League outfit Capricorn Cougars. Matheson said in a statement they had to pull out due to changes in their own business, but Fraser told *Leopold Method* it was because a planned subdevelopment of Matheson's Willows Golf Club had fallen through.

The Burkes' investment in the football club and the redevelopment, which was contingent on local council approving rezoning of the land, were 'bolted together', Fraser said. 'He had a plan that was predicated on a development that didn't go ahead, which meant a whole bunch of pieces had to fall into place to enable him to fund the thing ongoing. It was certainly speculative.' Their exit left Matheson as the club's sole financier, and he was unable to bear the Fury's substantial forecast losses on his own.

A desperate search at home and abroad by Matheson to find further backing for North Queensland proved fruitless. At one stage, he contemplated scrapping the Fury's agreement with Dairy Farmers Stadium in favour of a move to Tony Ireland Stadium, where they only needed an attendance of 3,500 to break even. However, with a seated capacity of only 1,000, the most basic of amenities and a cricket pitch in the middle of the ground, it was quickly knocked on the head.

By season's end, the FFA had taken over control of the club and, to avoid any embarrassment in the midst of their World Cup bid, decided to keep it alive. So scrambled were the Fury's finances that FFA had to essentially close down the club and start an entirely new entity to sidestep several debts, annulling seven contracts in the process, including that of Fowler, who was the

only one who the PFA could not reach a settlement for. He would later take legal action against the federation to seek damages, and played for Perth Glory in 2010–11.

'My intelligence was there was a whole bunch of legacy issues if FFA was going to fund it,' Fraser said. Fraser and the FFA also discovered that local businesses were more willing to get behind the club now that it was no longer the plaything of one man. 'Don was a new guy to town, he had only been around for a few years and he somehow alienated most of the real influential guys that run Townsville. As a result of that none of them would put their money in. Townsville's a place where people who have made their money there will support the city, they want it to grow and be strong and represented nationally and internationally. They usually get behind these things in any way they can. I couldn't work it out and none of them would tell me that until we took it over.'

'It was a disaster,' Rabieh Krayem told *Leopold Method*. Krayem is the chairman of the Northern Fury, a revival of the A-League club that now plays in NPL Queensland. In 2010, he was working in the recruitment industry when he says he fell into his role as the Fury's chief executive in their second and final season 'by accident'. A former CEO of NRL club North Queensland Cowboys and ex-general manager of the Cronulla Leagues Club, Krayem had begun his association with the club on a volunteer basis but was just the type of person FFA needed to stick around more permanently, so they asked him to.

'To hold that group [of players and staff] together, it was a complete nightmare. You couldn't sign anybody, you couldn't do a whole lot of stuff. And you're dealing with people's lives, that's the biggest thing. You couldn't give them any certainty. When you have uncertainty, you become dysfunctional. It was what it was, people became bitter and twisted.'

Krayem also concurred with Fraser's assessment of where the Fury stood in the eyes of locals. 'I don't believe there was a proper community engagement strategy,' he said. 'If you get community engagement right it's a success, and that's what happened with

the Wanderers. It was a whole different strategy to when the Fury came in. The people never felt like they owned the Fury, they felt like it belonged to an individual.'

'Fury Mark II', as Krayem calls it, were deserving wooden spooners in the 2010–11 season. Despite some memorable moments, many of them courtesy of coach Franz Straka and his impressive wardrobe of neutral-toned jackets, they simply couldn't compete with the squad they had under that set of circumstances. They won just four games for the season and lost their last eight on the trot to stagger to the finish line – or, more appropriately, the guillotine, since FIFA's decision in December 2010 to award World Cup hosting rights to Qatar was the death knell for North Queensland.

A desperate effort led by Krayem to 'Save the Fury' by raising $1.5 million in capital to satisfy FFA and earn a conditional one-year licence fell $1.2 million short, and that was that. 'Some people still don't forgive them,' Krayem said. 'If you made the original decision that the region could support a team, and you supported it for two years, why pull the plug? That's what no-one understands. "FFA" were three letters you didn't want to use up here.'

Twelve months earlier, Lowy had warned the people of North Queensland what would happen. 'We will not carry the Townsville team on our books,' he said. 'This is not what we're supposed to do and we don't have any resources for that. The Townsville people have got to want it and have got to pay for it.'

There are plenty of parallels between Gold Coast United's final season and the Fury's – amid huge financial pressure, a significantly weakened squad lacking in top-level experience finishes where everyone expects them to; dead last. But while there was a tinge of tragedy in North Queensland, Palmer's antics turned United's demise into a circus act.

'The truth is that after the first year he wanted to close the club and I told him, "Clive, it's not good for your image and for your publicity, and most of the players are on two-year contracts so

you have to pay them anyway, so you may as well play,"' Bleiberg said. 'Then he wanted to close it after the second year but again, somehow I convinced him. It was a very small amount of money that he gave, that's why we played with all the kids in the third year.'

One of those kids was Mitch Cooper, who unwittingly found himself at the centre of a national storm when Palmer decided to name him captain for United's clash with Melbourne Heart in February 2012, incensing the few senior players remaining. Cooper was 17 years and 152 days old. Bleiberg famously played down the move and said it was purely 'ceremonial', but in fact, it was another move in Palmer's ongoing chess game with Lowy. Bleiberg was suspended for his comments and then resigned, with his assistant Mike Mulvey taking over as caretaker. Fans were gobsmacked. Days later, Palmer told the *Courier-Mail* that he didn't even like football and thought rugby league was a much better sport.

Yet all of that was really nothing compared to the surreal 'Freedom of Speech' game. United were scheduled to face Melbourne Victory at Skilled Park later that month. When the players ran out, they had the words 'Freedom of Speech' plastered on their midriffs instead of their usual sponsor Hyatt Regency Coolum, the Sunshine Coast resort Palmer had purchased in the off-season. Palmer was involved in a legal battle with Hyatt at the time and no longer desired to promote the company by any means – and, since he had to cover up their logo with something, he came up with 'Freedom of Speech', an apparent reference to an earlier stoush with FFA involving Bleiberg and comments about referees.

If he hadn't already done so, that night Palmer turned the A-League into a laughing stock. The FFA wore the embarrassment, then promptly began the process of revoking United's licence. Again, like the Fury, a last-ditch attempt to save the club was ignored, the Western Sydney Wanderers were brought in as the competition's 10th team, and everyone moved on. There was also Palmer's short-lived rebel organisation Football Australia – but that's another story entirely.

Looking back, it beggars belief how badly the A-League's first attempt at expansion was handled by almost all parties involved. There is very little margin for error in the competitive Australian sporting marketplace and even less in regions like North Queensland and the Gold Coast, which don't boast the sheer population mass of the capital cities. Attention to detail is paramount, and it was sorely missing in the case of both clubs. FFA had to go in with a long-term view but were driven by short-term interests and paid the price.

History will not look kindly on who FFA awarded licences to. They clearly were not ready to handle a character like Palmer, who burst into the public consciousness during his three-year rollercoaster ride in football. As for the Fury, FFA were not prepared for the eventuality that Matheson and his partners would run out of money so soon.

Most damningly of all, where other codes would likely stick out a rocky start in a new market, FFA had no qualms cutting and running from North Queensland and the Gold Coast and leaving scorched earth behind. 'For every team that comes into the competition, FFA have to have at least enough money to last two years of transition time, should things go wrong,' Bleiberg said. 'It's not good for the game and it's not good for anybody to lose clubs. It's embarrassing for all concerned.'

FFA chief executive David Gallop has, with his repeated 'fish where the fish are' line about population bases, effectively ruled out any expansion into regional areas in the foreseeable future. A third team in Sydney and a second team based in Brisbane are thought to be the likely new clubs – a significant change in tact from an organisation previously governed by who had money and where potential World Cup stadiums would be. Fraser, however, won't hear suggestions that North Queensland or the Gold Coast are incapable of sustaining an A-League franchise.

'My view is you can have these teams but you have to be able to support them,' he said. 'It shouldn't cost more than $1 million to

prop up a team in an area you believe is important to developing the game, if they have the stadium and enough support from local businesses. If we have a 14 or 16-team competition we can support them because of the content we can sell to the TV stations. Look at the GWS Giants and Gold Coast Suns – they're both shite, but it's about content. The AFL takes a much longer view at this. News Limited supported the NRL initially through Melbourne Storm. The FFA went, "sign here – now piss off and do it yourself."'

Krayem agrees. 'For me, it's not about size, it's about can you get the right number of supporters to make the financial model work,' he said. 'For it to be a truly national game it has to come into the regional areas. As long as you have a sustained financial models and a base of supporters, rugby league has shown it – it can work.'

Krayem has a unique perspective, having first helmed the Cowboys, then an ailing A-League club, and now an NPL entity with top-tier ambitions. He believes for the sake of the game, FFA should declare their hand on expansion plans as soon as possible. 'I've got no doubt the next expansion will happen in big cities, there's nothing wrong with that – as long as we've got a vision for the next 10 years,' he said. 'You've got to give people aspirations. I've got no doubt the FFA has enough knowledge right now of where their expansion is going to be, so they should give people plenty of time to prepare for it. If they can't, you don't have to go there. It'd be such a big thing for the game to say publicly: "Seven years down the track, we want a team in North Queensland and this is what the region has to do." What it means is the game's focused for seven years, there's pressure on the football community to tick all the boxes to get there.'

Most people point the finger squarely at Palmer for all of Gold Coast United's failings – and to a certain extent that is justified. 'It wasn't rushed,' Bleiberg insists. 'It's not true to say the Gold Coast is doom and gloom football-wise because Clive didn't want to make any more efforts for his own reasons. Had Clive not been upset the Gold Coast would exist still today. We would have 5,000–6,000

people every game which, for a 400,000 population is a reasonable number.'

Whether that is a number FFA would accept is another question entirely. What is clear is that United did have a latent support base that, for whatever reason, did not feel engaged enough with the club to become regular spectators. Palmer twice threw open the gates at Skilled Park, providing free entry to all fans, and on each occasion locals came out of the woodwork.

'All these people rocked up and they had Gold Coast United gear on,' Mulhearn said. 'All these kids had the jerseys and you just thought, well, they've not been coming. There's reasons why they're not coming but they obviously have an affiliation with the club, a support of the club, even if they're maybe not a diehard week-in, week-out fan.'

'The people of the Gold Coast should blame themselves, too,' said Bleiberg. 'After what's happened I believe there will be another team on the Gold Coast and the soccer people will come in droves. But partly because of Clive, partly because maybe in the beginning it wasn't the club of the people but his own private toy, maybe because of all the private jets and the flashy things that he did for the team while the Gold Coast was under economic stress ... maybe it put people off. A lot of people in the Gold Coast love soccer, talk soccer, but didn't support it. Hopefully it's a lesson learned by everybody.'


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SPORTING SPIRIT: THE CULTURE AND MENTALITY OF WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

PETE SMITH

> I watched the England-Germany women's football match on TV. Why was it screened? Women can't play football. They don't even now the basic rules. When tackled they get up and play on. They don't pretend to be hurt. They don't dive. They don't get opponents sent off. They wrestle at corner kicks. Worst of all, they don't harass the match officials. As any fool who has watched the men's Premier League knows, that is not the way to play football.

THE ABOVE LETTER APPEARED IN ENGLISH NEWSPAPER *The Independent* last year after the national team drew a record 46,000 crowd to Wembley for an international against European champions Germany.

As the first stand-alone game for women at football's spiritual home – one shown live on the BBC – the match undoubtedly introduced a new generation to women's football, and the idea

of the a women's team being treated the same as their male counterparts. Equally a new audience, presumably including the male letter author, witnessed a different perspective to football.

To 'play like a girl' is a line sometimes thrown about as a mild form of denigration. Equally in a football context, it is delivered without any sense of irony. Yet watching women's football can be like harking back to an Edwardian age of sport for sport's sake, when the game was played with a level of honesty, purity and integrity. Winning remains the primary aim, but playing the game with the correct degree of values, including a tough spirit of competition, was almost an unspoken contract.

Thankfully, the Sheilas, Wogs and Poofters era – the catch-phrase coined by late great Aussie football missionary Johnny Warren to describe middle Australia's scorn for football – is largely a thing of the past. Yet, each and every current or former female Australian international player has undoubtedly been forced to develop a thick skin during her career. A high profile incident during the Matildas recent tour of Cyprus provided just a single insight into the unseen hardships endured by female footballers.

The looming Women's World Cup will, by and large, provide strong supporting evidence of the unsaid creed which underpins the women's game.

At the 2011 FIFA Women's World Cup USA's attacking talisman Abby Wambach was a picture of calm as she addressed the media in the bowels of Frankfurt's Wald Stadion. Still dressed in her full kit and football boots, the match was so recent the aroma of upturned turf emanating from the players' garments and studs was still present in the air. Minutes earlier, she and her team-mates had somehow missed what was possibly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be crowned a world champion. Japan had somehow conjured a win on penalties against the favourites who had carved out countless opportunities to win. The football gods were not kind to Wambach and her team-mates, meaning the US players had good reason to mop in the manner of most 21st century sportspeople. Yet Wambach still found the graciousness and perspective to say

that 'Japan winning was a good thing and something the country needed'.

Just three months prior Japan had been devastated by the Great East Earthquake and resulting tsunami which devastated the country and killed thousands. Yet just 12 months earlier the FIFA World Cup final in Johannesburg was one of bitter rancour and spiteful tactics played amid a distasteful on-field atmosphere. Not even the genteel spirit of the frail and elderly Nelson Mandela, who was introduced to the crowd before the match, could seemingly influence the mood.

It was likely the ugliest final to be played in football's greatest competition. The Netherlands wild and at times vicious spoiling tactics were clear from the outset. Spain responded in kind with ultra gamesmanship and a level of intimidation honed by years of professional football at the highest level. The Dutch vitriol continued after the full-time whistle with distasteful display directed at the referee, yet few neutral judges could back their cause for complaints.

It was another demonstration of the complete absence of perspective for which football fans and players have long been renowned. The swaggering and carefree bohemian stars of the Oranje's 1974 World Cup final appearance must have been turning in their figurative footballing graves.

The contrast with the final at Germany 2011 could barely have been greater. As a metaphor for the mentality and attitude between men's and women's footballers it was sadly apt. There is a certain purity, groundedness and honesty in women's football that can set it apart from the male equivalent.

Of course it seems a facile generalisation in the black and white written word to say women's football has a level of on-field integrity that rarely is displayed in men's football. To line up men and women's football as two protagonists, one donning a black Stetson and the other a white one would be a little too stereotyped. Like all good storylines, there are shades of grey. This is not to deride men's football or eulogise women's football. However, in

broad generalised terms, the evidence is overwhelming.

Inch by inch, football has lost some of its soul down the decades. In many ways women's football offers an antidote to the cynicism and commercialism of the modern game. A kind of stripped back football which is closer to the era of a crossbar made of string and the referee waving a little white hankie, than it is epoch where players feign injury to get an opponent sent off and boast an official supplier of Beats headphones or Alice bands. Surely all hope for the modern game was lost with the hitherto unaffected Lionel Messi – a rare modern poster boy for sporting values – recently unveiling a tattoo sleeve!

At the 2011 Women's World Cup, Canadian star Christine Sinclair returned to the field with a broken nose to help the cause after fighting, and winning, a sideline battle with her own team's medical staff to be allowed back on the field. Playing like a girl indeed!

Sometimes the difference is in the cynical gamesmanship, or lack thereof. In a local notable incident a few seasons back Sydney FC's Ellyse Perry played on despite needing several stitches in a leg gash following a wild tackle. Despite watering eyes, Perry bounced back up immediately with an old-school 'Don't show 'em your hurt' mentality. It is almost impossible to imagine the same scenario happening in men's football.

So why is the mentality of women's football on a different tangent to men's football? Do women approach sport with a different mindset? Why is the culture and approach to the game in women's football so distinct? And how did it develop thus, or has it always been this way?

Undoubtedly there are many parts to the jigsaw. Women's football at the top level involves modest sums of money, and profile. That is a clear and obvious distinction. Dig a little deeper and the history of the game surely provides some of the answers.

The Matildas made their international bow only in 1979, eight

years after the first FIFA recognised international match, which came almost exactly 100 years after the first men's international match. The women's game both here and globally is very much still in its infancy in relative terms.

To describe Julie Dolan as a pioneer seems almost inadequate. After touring Hong Kong in 1975 – possibly the first off-shore visit by an Australian women's side – with the famed St George Budapest club of the era, Dolan went on to lead out the national team in their historic debut at the end of the 1970s.

Thanks in part to a decade-long international career and the subsequent naming of the Australian player of the year in her honour, Dolan boasts an unparalleled connection and insight into women's football in this country.

In the 1970s to be an Aussie football fan almost made you part of a sub-culture. Football folk were often considered, at least sub-consciously, to be fringe members of society in middle Australia. But if that wasn't enough divisive enough, being a proponent of women's football took things to another level. Of course society looked upon females in a different light compared to now. Incredible as it seems, a bar on the employment of married women in the Commonwealth Public Service was only abolished in 1966. A woman's place was most defiantly not in the rough and tumble of a football field.

Dolan, however, was different to the pack. Every fortnight the teenager with an apparently odd passion for football, made the 12-hour bus trip from Ballina on the NSW far north coast to Sydney. Leaving after school on a Friday, Dolan would get a training session and a match in over the weekend, before arriving back home just in time for Monday morning classes.

'I remember going to the schools carnival in Sydney, and I would be allowed to play and I can recall people coming to see what the girl player could do, which undoubtedly provided a novelty factor,' Dolan says with a smile. 'To a degree I could compete [with the boys] to a certain age, round the 14s, 15s. This is an era when girls pretty much only played netball and hockey.'

Dolan's maverick spirit extended to surfing which was, even more so than football, a male domain. And, as crudely detailed in cult book and film *Puberty Blues*, a female's role surfside was far more likely to be Chiko Roll purchaser than running into the waves with a board under the arm.

'I would go out in the surf as well, and would be the only female in sight. The surfing scene was cut-throat. But I didn't see myself as brave. [With football] I just wanted to play, the opportunity was there, and I had parents that supported me.'

It is an astonishing, and indeed untold, tale of commitment and sacrifice. Dolan would, however, receive recognition for her dedication by being named captain of the first ever Australian women's team to take the field. The Australian Women's Soccer Association managed to get a New Zealand side to these shores, and while various touring parties had previously travelled to Asia donning the green and gold, this was deemed to be the first truly representative side. Thus the Matildas were born, even if that particular moniker was still a way off.

There was little fanfare heading into the first match, and scant media interest. The match was played at Miranda in Sydney's southern suburbs, which proved a quirky coincidence for Dolan who was turning out for local side Gymea, just one suburb away. 'I was hoping it would have been somewhere exotic – Bora Bora (French Polynesia) would have been nice – but instead it was in Miranda,' Dolan says dryly.

Just a couple of hundred spectators shuffled into Seymour Shaw, home of the Sutherland Sharks, sitting on the working-bee built scaffold and wood plank assembly, a structure that would probably fail local council approval in the modern day. But perhaps the modest surrounds were appropriate. After all, part of the players' build-up included sewing the Australia crest onto the shirt. A grounded sense of communal DIY spirit was born, which to this day remains part of the fabric of the Matildas.

Dolan doesn't recall a sense of taking in the history-making nature of the match, nor a significant level of excitement. 'Mostly

it [the build-up] for me was more focused on getting some publicity for the match and women's soccer. Game day came about and we played the game. Simple as that. There were players coming from work to play the game in the afternoon. It was not as if we were in camp all week readying ourselves. It was more a case of players finishing work at Coles at lunchtime and coming down to play in the afternoon.'

For the record, Australia and New Zealand played out a 2-2 draw with Sandra Brentnall scoring Australia's historic first goal. But were Dolan and her team-mates aware of the significance of the match?

'Only to some extent,' she says. 'You didn't have a profile for women's sport. At the end of the day there wasn't much publicity because the press weren't interested. You didn't have the hoo-ha, the media attention, none of that. Mum and dad and a few cousins, plus a few bystanders might have come to the first international. So in a way it didn't have an enormous impact on us. It didn't make the excitement any less for us because we were playing for our country, but it didn't have any real significance in the eyes of the public.'

Former Matildas midfield star Joanne Peters has, more so than most, lived the highs and lows that women's football can bring. Accruing 110 caps in a 13-year period concluding in 2009, Peters is statistically our third most decorated national team player.

Peters grew up in Leeton in southern NSW near Wagga Wagga and, like Dolan, moved to Sydney during her high school years. 'I was the only girl that played in the whole comp really,' she says of her time playing junior football in the bush. 'It didn't bother me too much, though it did when I was older and sometimes I copped some grief from the boys.'

Peters' career straddles a fascinating period of Australian women's football, including several landmark on-field events; the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games and the start of the W-League. Also in

that period was the famous, or perhaps infamous, Matildas nude calendar produced ahead of the Olympics as the team attempted to garner some of the spotlight. More notably, albeit perhaps less tabloid-worthy, was the team's breakthrough showing at the 2007 FIFA Women's World Cup with the Matildas reaching the quarter-finals for the first time, while playing an attacking and entertaining brand of football.

'We used to strive to get two lines in the newspaper,' Peters says in reference to the first decade of her international career. 'I recall well after the calendar, and it was probably around 2004–05, that we got some really good results, we started to realise we could get publicity from playing well and through our football.

'We had a sense that we had to promote the game the way we would want it. I love that we had some ownership as players. And the sense that we are responsible for how the community sees us. That can get lost now just a little.'

That breakthrough showing at China 2007 was chronicled in the *Never Say Die* Matildas documentary. In it Peters coined a phrase she often uses to describe the mentality and attitude of a typical female player: soccer chick.

'There is a certain type of girl that has not just the athletic ability to do that, but there is also the other side of which is being part of the camaraderie that sport brings,' Peters says. 'I think there is a certain coolness about it too. Soccer chick … we are pretty cool, we are good at what we do, we love the community aspect of it, and we feel a part of something.

'Obviously girls that love sport aren't afraid to get sweaty and dirty. But I think football takes it a bit further. It is quite a physical game, the fitness level required is unbelievable, the skill and co-ordination is right up there. There is a certain type of girl that not just possesses the athletic attributes required, but also the camaraderie which the sport brings.

'There is very much a humility in the women's game. Sometimes that is not necessarily good, and we find it hard to be proud and be an entertainer. Things like not celebrating goals as much as the

boys, and not over-reacting and the drama ... I think that is related to our humility.

'The main change is the popularity. For me it was always trying to justify that not only can girls play soccer. Now everyone knows girls play soccer, and play really well. That is a massive leap from people not even knowing we play.

'[Women's football] is about the love of the game. If you love the game, you respect it. Play hard, but play fair. If it becomes for the show or the money, the basics and culture of the game can get lost.'

Julie Dolan believes better behaviour is partly a women's sport thing, more so than it is a reflection of the Matildas' history. 'I think you just want to get the game played,' she says. 'I think it [sporting values] stretches across women's sport. You just concentrate on the game and do not think about trying to gain an [unfair] advantage.

'I would rather try and put the ball in the back of the net, than test whether the ref is going to give me a free-kick or not. And I think match officials respect that as well. They are much more likely to treat you as the competitor that you are, and the game runs better.

'I think girls get the shits if people start carrying on. It is like, Christ, get on with the game. You would be hard pressed to find a bunch of girls who take dives or roll around with one eye on the ref.

'Maybe that is a reflection of what is on the TV. We tend to emulate what happens on TV. Young guys will of course see players rolling around and grabbing their knees, and so on. Maybe it comes from that, given women's sport in general is not that well represented [in the media], therefore that [mentality] is not fed into people's psyche.'

Many would undoubtedly say the stakes are not as high in women's football. Yet if poor on-field behaviour occurs at park level, it is far more likely to be in male football. 'To say the stakes aren't high in women's football is perhaps a public opinion,' Dolan says. 'But to me the stakes are very high if I'm playing for my

country. I don't care who is watching or not watching.

'Just because there is less money or media attention or adulation,' Dolan continues in reference to the most recent World Cups, 'certainly doesn't mean any less to those players.' She does, however, concede that mentality 'could change, depending on the amount of exposure you get'.

Matildas coach Alen Stajcic has coached women's football for nearly 15 years helping produce countless W-League and international players via the NSW Institute, as well as also achieving significant success in the national competition with Sydney FC. Stajcic, who lead the Matildas to Canada for the FIFA Women's World Cup, is reluctant to generalise too much based simply on gender.

'I have seen good and bad behaviour in everyone, regardless of gender,' Stajcic says. 'There is probably a little bit more diving in men's football. Maybe that comes from street smartness, the importance that hangs on the result, the amount they are paid and the level the game has evolved to.

'And when you open the door [to new aspects of a game] things can expand very quickly. Rugby league is an example. They used to laugh for so many years at footballers taking dives, or whatever, but now they have introduced video evidence for a player staying down trying to earn a penalty. So now the door is ajar.

'It [unsporting behaviour] hasn't really come into women's football, it hasn't evolved, and hopefully it doesn't. But I have seen it, so it is not immune. But we don't want to open the door for it, because it is not the best element of football.'

Traditionally female footballers have grown up as somewhat of an odd one out. However, a recent explosion in participation has changed that experience for most young female players in Australia, meaning the national team players of tomorrow will have experienced a very different grounding to the Matildas of generations past.

'When I first started coaching almost every single young player had been the only girl in a boys team,' says Stajcic. 'Whereas now they are coming up through girls teams, and are joining clubs because other girls are playing. There are full girls comps, which was unheard of just a few years ago. So it is becoming more mainstream and an acceptable sport for young girls to play.

'The evolution of that is the girls that come out at the other end. They have grown up in an environment where they are not the odd one out, where it acceptable to play. Hopefully our participation rate can jump even higher, and hopefully the Matildas [profile] can lead to even more youngsters playing football.'

Elite women footballers have long made massive sacrifices to play the game, and in return received minimal financial remuneration or attention from the media. Matildas captain Melissa Barbieri was triumphantly holding the Asian Cup at Sydney Airport upon the national team's successful return from the continental championship, when she famously put out a clarion call for greater recognition of the team and their achievements. That 2010 success made the Matildas the first Australian side to win an Asian crown since the move to Asia in 2006. Yet it's fair to say Barbieri's efforts received a muted response at best.

Currently national team players can't afford to live purely off the income generated playing in the green and gold. Aside from camp and match fees, a top-tier member of the Matildas squad will only earn around $20,000 annually from international football.

'I don't think the world knows what we've put into our overall life, how many jobs people have while playing soccer and studying on the side,' Matildas midfielder Katrina Gorry said recently. 'Hopefully in the near future, the younger generations won't have to do what we're doing at the moment, and we can get more sponsorships and support in the game.

'But, to put on that jersey on [in Canada], I can't even imagine what will be going through my head. It will make it all worth it,' said Gorry, unwittingly registering the same sentiment enjoyed by Dolan decades earlier.

Stajcic backs the view that female players at the top level are as driven as their male counterparts. 'There are more similarities than differences at the elite level,' he says. 'They are both professional, determined and driven. The major differences come from how hard you have to work to get there, meaning the sacrifices you make to your lifestyle compared to what a male player would have to do. Certainly in Australia an elite female trains almost as much as an elite male for considerably less. My appreciation of what they do is pretty high when females achieve something special at elite level. Certainly they [women's players] aren't playing for money, so the motivation is otherwise.'

And what of the differences for a coach in managing male and female players. 'That is a topic I get asked about a lot,' Stajcic says. 'From my perspective there is enough variations in any team of either gender, in terms of personality, application and behaviour. I think the art of coaching is finding out what that personality is.'

Stajcic says he hasn't seen much change in the attitude of female players during his years on the sideline, rather it is the 'technical and tactical and physically aspects have evolved to such a high level'.

Stajcic does, however, concede there is a kernel of truth in one commonly heard line. 'Female players are more coachable,' he says. 'Although, that is still a little bit of a generalisation. One difference I would say is that boys are just a slightly more consistently competitive at training, and that is probably truer the lower down the pyramid that you go. But really the closer to the top the similarities [between genders] are greater than the differences.'

The massive growth across all aspects of women's football seems certain to continue. Of course it is the only football code where a significant number of women are participants. There was a noteworthy focus on women's football in Football Federation Australia's 20-year Strategic Plan. Notably, the intention to consider bidding for the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup. 'Having that voice from the top helps push down throughout the various

pillars of the game, including schools,' said Stajcic. 'Having it co-ordinated from the top down will give things a real shot in the arm. It would be great all-round and eventually, hopefully, the national team will benefit.'

But will more money and profile provide a downside? 'I think we are just starting to see just a little bit of change in the attitude,' Peters says. 'Making a W-League team now can leave some players feeling they are amazing, whereas before you weren't heard of. I always loved the humble aspect of the game. Your motivation is to get better as a player. If a player thinks "I have made W-League so, I'm amazing", that can be a little irritating for someone like myself who was never satisfied with my achievements. I always wanted more.

'It used to be, and probably still is, a way of life. If you wanted to play football, you had to sacrifice everything, and you didn't mind. Now, because there is a little bit of money, it's an actual career choice, which is not necessarily a good thing. The girls at the top level still sacrifice a lot, and being away from family, and it is not like it is a massive amount of money.

'There will still be girls that do it no matter what. But it is still a way of life that can be very rewarding. Now that it is becoming a younger girls thing, it is something you might do when you're young, and then move on.'

'In America, soccer is something you pick your 10-year-old daughter up from,' wise-cracked comedian John Oliver. The upside is that with an incredible female 1.7 million participants, and 40% of the playing population (compared to 20% in Australia), there is a massive ready-made market for women's football, and arguably the only nation where women's football is a fully viable commercial entity.

The United States – with women's access to sport enshrined in federal law as portrayed in the film *Gracie* – boasts a public that has, at times, embraced the women's national team as pop-culture icons.

Women's football is developing at warp speed and the local and international game is likely to look significantly different even in eight short years. So too, one wonders what on-field behaviour at a Women's World Cup in 2023 would look like compared to years gone by. Women's football has traditionally been the preserve of North America, Northern Europe and Anglo countries. And, curiously enough, communist countries such as China and North Korea. Presumably the state identified early on that women's football was a potential viable route to sporting success.

Arguably, the only significant gamesmanship at Germany 2011 came from Brazil, famously during extra time of an epic quarter-final against USA. In many place of the world, gaining an advantage by bending the rules is not necessarily frowned up. The cultural breadth of international women's football is undergoing massive change, one that will continue to broaden. Just two World Cup cycles ago a 24-team tournament would have been unthinkable in terms of adequate competition. Now, women's football has a genuine foothold in all corners of the globe, and 24 competing nations at Canada 2015 is a suitable-sized field.

The latterly-named Socceroos played their first international way back in 1922. Indeed, fast-forward 36 years from the Socceroos' international introduction takes us to the late 1950s, a period of unprecedented growth and change for Australian football as post-WWII migration impacted on local football. It was a defining moment for Australian football, one not superseded in its enormity and impact until the establishment of the FFA and the A-League just 10 years ago.

In the past decade Australian women's football has made a generational leap both off, and especially on, the field. And all the signs are that women's football will experience exponential growth in every facet over the coming few years. Inevitably that will bring a degree of cultural change off the field. Will money and profile change the intrinsic culture of women's football?


JVC
Reebok

VITEZSLAV LAVICKA: THE A-LEAGUE'S FORGOTTEN REVOLUTIONARY

KATE COHEN

ON A SUNNY DAY IN JANUARY, 2009, JUST OVER 23,000 FANS watched on at the Adelaide Oval as Adelaide United hosted Sydney FC in season four of the A-League. It was a match littered with still familiar names (Eugene Galekovic, Alex Brosque, Mark Bridge and Scott Jamieson) as well as those since forgotten (Kristian Sarkies, Fabien Barbiero, Stuart Musialik and Beau Busch). It was also a match that is unrecognisable compared to today's standards in the A-League.

The differences are clear right from the kick-off. When referee Chris Beath started the match, Adelaide passed the ball to back to left back Jamieson who played a long ball forward over halfway towards striker Cristiano. OK, so it's not *that* foreign compared to what we see now – plenty of sides still aim to start the match on the front foot by winning the second ball in the opponent's half. But when Sydney FC centre back Iain Fyfe was fouled by Cristiano just past the centre circle, something different happened.

Midfielder Musialik ran to the spot where the foul was awarded and, instead of taking a quick free kick to one of his two centre backs, both of whom were free, placed the ball down and moved

forward. Sydney FC then pushed forward as goalkeeper Ivan Necevski trotted up to the edge of the centre circle to launch the ball into Adelaide's penalty box. The long punt was successful, with striker Alex Brosque winning the flick on but the second ball fell to the feet of no nonsense defender Sasa Ognenovski in the box who swiftly returned the ball back over halfway with his first touch.

Ognenovski's clearance was controlled by Fyfe who passed back to Necevski in his box. Adelaide pushed up towards the halfway line as Fyfe received possession back from his goalkeeper under no pressure. But with space in front of him, Fyfe took one touch to get the ball out from his feet and smashed it back into Adelaide's half towards Sydney playmaker Steve Corica.

Corica was able to bring the ball under control with his chest. With his back to goal and under pressure, he passed backwards to Fyfe's defensive partner Busch. With the ball at his feet, Busch similarly opted for the aerial route towards Brosque who was beaten in the air by Adelaide defender Daniel Mullen. Midfielder Brendan Gan won the second ball and after regaining possession for the third time, Sydney FC strung three consecutive passes together before Fyfe decided it was time to once again attempt a long ball, already the sixth of the game, towards Brosque. On this occasion, Adelaide United was able to win the ball back. All this commotion, and the match was just 90 seconds old.

Fast forward five years and one day to season nine of the A-League where, on a typically mild Melbourne day, Melbourne Victory hosted Brisbane Roar at AAMI Park. Pitting first-placed Brisbane against third-placed Victory, it was a match which was separated by one of the great team goals in the short history of the A-League.

After a Victory attack, James Troisi's shot was saved by Michael Theo who, after briefly fumbling the ball, raced to the edge of his box to roll the ball out to central midfielder Matt McKay. Victory pressed immediately, trying to win the ball back deep in Brisbane's half. But Brisbane didn't panic. McKay passed forward to Thomas

Broich, who moved the ball backwards to keep possession. Centre back Matt Smith received possession and was closed down quickly, but calmly clipped a ball out to Ivan Franjic in space. Brisbane had played through the press with relative ease and proceeded to move the ball from left to right and forwards and backwards before Liam Miller slotted the ball into the back of the net at the other end of the field.

'That's a world class goal, in any league,' raved Fox Sports' pundit Mark Bosnich at half-time. Brisbane, after saving a shot in their own box, had strung 21 passes together and moved the ball from box to box in the ultimate display of control and understanding of a system of play.

It was somewhat symbolic that newly appointed Socceroos boss Ange Postecoglou watched on from the stands has his two former sides put on a display of structured possession and pressing football. After all, Postecoglou's finger prints were all over both sides, with Victory continuing with his striker-less system with an emphasis on vertical passing and the possession game he implemented still entrenched in Brisbane's identity.

So incredible was Brisbane's success under Postecoglou – consecutive grand final wins, a Premier's Plate and a 36 game unbeaten run – that it is rightly heralded as the best side in the history of the A-League. But Postecoglou also left a lasting impact on the style of the club which was highlighted when, in season nine, Brisbane again won the double under Mike Mulvey with a largely 'Postecoglou' side and style of play.

Similarly, Postecoglou's time at Victory from 2012 to 2013 left such a clear identity that when, 18 months after leaving to take up the Socceroos job, Postecoglou was asked how proud he was to have laid the foundations for the club's success the day after they wrapped up the Premier's Plate in season 10.

The comparison is also fitting because it highlights the vast improvements of playing standard during the short history of the A-League. From the early years of hoofball to the current levels we see today where structure in all phases of the game is paramount

for success. As a result, the narrative that surrounds the 10-year development of the A-League is broken into two distinct categories: the chaotic and disorganised five years before Postecoglou's arrival and the five years since the 'Postecoglou Revolution' took place at Brisbane Roar.

Postecoglou is widely heralded as the catalyst for change in the style of A-League sides. But there is a risk here. By simplistically breaking the A-League's development over 10 years into 'before' and 'after' Postecoglou, we ignore the fact that the league was already constantly and steadily improving in the early seasons and we also ignore important catalysts for this development.

The A-League at the start was, and to a different extent still is, one largely based on constant transitions. Without the more concentrated focus on maintaining possession we are familiar with today, it was a league where teams looked to exploit the spaces available by getting the ball forward as quickly, and sometimes as crudely, as possible.

'In the first years of the A-League I remember the level of organisation of teams was very low,' Craig Foster told *Leopold Method*. 'How do I know that? Because it's my job is to analyse and in the early years I would have producers ask me "can you analyse this game?"; I would have to say "I can't – it's chaos". You couldn't analyse it. You couldn't see what the coach was trying to do: without the ball, with the ball, in transition. The teams were all over the place! There were massive spaces, they would hoof it in the air … it was chaos.'

If we take that perception of chaos and fast forward to during and after Postecoglou's time with Brisbane Roar, we are left with two incredibly different leagues. Football in Australia has certainly progressed. Often the answer of how the league went from one to the other is to simply classify it as a revolution and to place credit primarily with Postecoglou.

This, however, ignores the fact that the A-League was already evolving from season one. Local players adjusted and grew into being full-time professionals, facilities were upgraded and as the

level of foreigners improved. The standard of the A-League was steadily improving from the opening seasons.

The step often forgotten in the improvement of the A-League over 10 seasons is Vitezslav Lavicka, the coach of Sydney FC from 2009 to 2012. Lavicka helped to shift the thinking towards organised systems of play. In his first year in charge, Lavicka implemented a system at Sydney that took advantage of the A-League as it then was, and by doing so he was the catalyst as the league moved from disorganisation and chaos towards organised systems and wanting to control every phase of the match.

From day one, it was clear Vitezslav Lavicka had a system of play in mind to implement at Sydney FC. He was signed on the basis of what Sydney FC owner David Traktovenko called 'effective style of play'. As he was unveiled as head coach, Lavicka said 'we would like to play attractive football, and I know results are important so you need balance'. Attractive, effective and balanced was what he delivered in his first season in charge.

An intense preseason allowed Lavicka, along with his assistant coaches Michael Zach and Tony Popovic, to implement his intended style. The messages from the camp highlighted that Lavicka wanted his side to play a narrow 4-4-2 diamond with 'support from the fullbacks going forward'. An unbeaten 13-game pre-season, conceding just two goals against predominately state league opponents, allowed the players to become accustomed to what their new manager wanted. This Sydney FC side would be structured with and without the ball, efficient going forward and able to take advantage of a league based on disorganised transitions.

'Vitja [Lavicka] was very big on discipline and how he wanted his team to play,' former Sydney FC midfielder Terry McFlynn told *Leopold Method*. 'He focused on everything from the organisation of the back four and the characteristics of each player to the fundamentals that needed to happen on the pitch. Before [Lavicka],

we worked on shape and we worked on tactics but there wasn't a constant and concentrated focus on it daily – on structure and tactics and even set pieces. Under Lavicka it was all about taking control of every situation in every moment of the game.

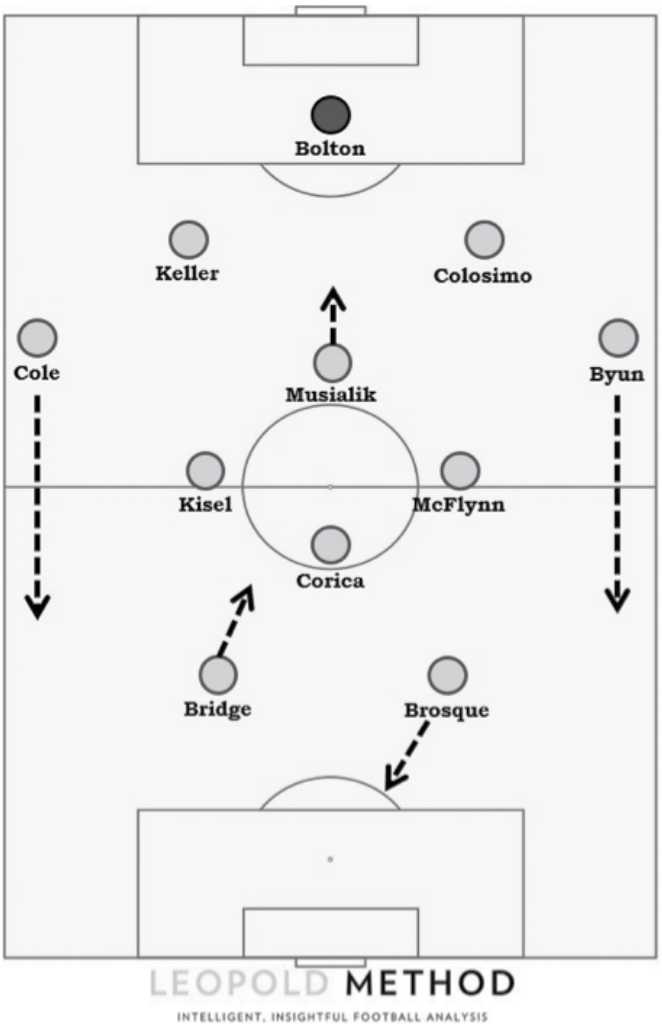
'We would work on tactics every day. There would always be a fun element to every session, a fitness element and then we would finish with a tactical element. That was either opposed 11 versus 11 or unopposed shape work and going through certain patterns and movements. We worked a lot on structures if the ball was in a particular area and how we were supposed to react and defensively it was the same – looking at how we structure ourselves depending on where we were on the pitch.'

McFlynn was an important cog in Lavicka's side, playing on the left of a 4-4-2 diamond and captaining the side in the grand final win over rivals Melbourne Victory. On the right side of the diamond was Slovakian international Karol Kisel who brought a wealth of experience to a side hoping to play a more 'European' style.

'The difference in style between Australian football and in Europe is very different,' Kisel told the *Sydney Morning Herald* after his first A-League game. 'North Queensland [in Round 1] played a very Australian style, but what we need here in Sydney is a European style. We have a European coach who wants us to play that style and, I think, in Australia that's the way to win the championship.

'In just three months [of preseason], [the team] has improved so much. You can see now that they are starting to learn to play a more European game – it is much more tactical, and that is what the coach wants.'

Kisel had played previously under Lavicka at Slovan Liberec and Sparta Prague and alongside McFlynn and, at the base of midfield, Stuart Musialik, the three were perfect foils for Steve Corica in the creative midfield role.



Sydney FC's 4-4-2 diamond from the 2009–10 A-League season.

Steve Corica, who has been involved for all 10 seasons with the club, told *Leopold Method* that Musialik, McFlynn and Kisel 'could run all day'. 'Those three did a lot of running behind me in midfield to break up the play,' he said. 'My role defensively was to basically stop their No.6 [deepest midfielder] from playing. Once we won it back they would look to join in going forward, particularly Karol and Tezza [McFlynn].'

Midfielders and fullbacks bursting forward in support of Corica and strikers Mark Bridge, Alex Brosque and John Aloisi became trademarks of Lavicka's side. Sydney FC was a well-balanced side – effective at set pieces, rock solid defensively and comfortable at keeping possession for long spells. And they were ruthlessly efficient in transition.

This was made clear in the fourth minute of season five when Aloisi opened the scoring against North Queensland Fury. It came as a lightening quick counter attack from a Robbie Fowler free kick on the edge of Sydney FC's penalty box. Fowler's shot was saved by goalkeeper Clint Bolton, and Brosque, Aloisi, Kisel, Brendan Gan and Kofi Danning sprinted forward over halfway to catch Fury out at the back. It took them just 14 seconds to go from defending a free kick to the ball being in the back of the net 110 metres down the other end of the field.

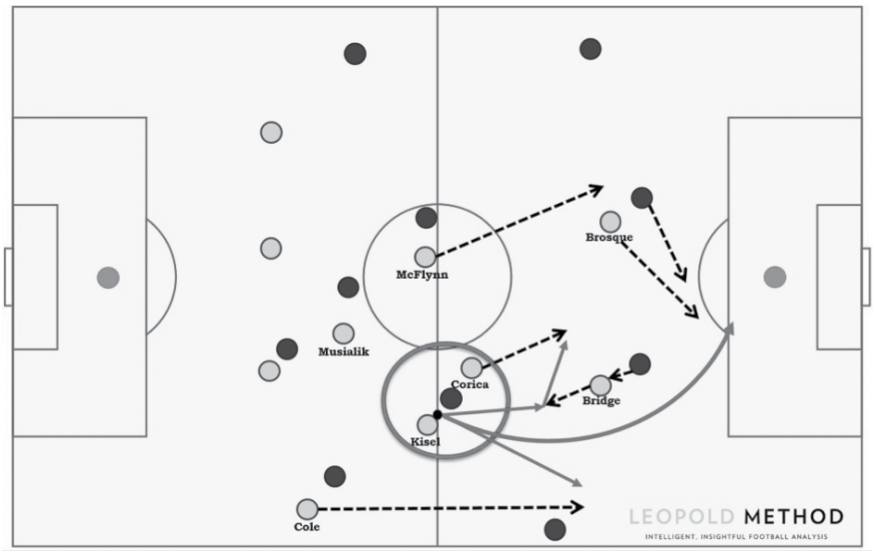
It was no fluke. Sydney FC under Lavicka were trained to be deadly on set pieces, both when they were attacking and also counter attack after the opponent had a set piece. Practising for both situations proved pivotal three weeks later when Sydney defeated Wellington Phoenix 2-0 at the Sydney Football Stadium. Gan opened the scoring in the 77th minute, making an untracked run from the edge of the box to the penalty spot to head home Kisel's corner.

Just four minutes later Sydney FC scored another trademark counter attacking goal. With everyone back to defend a late Phoenix corner, only Bridge remained up front. After centre back Stefan Keller's clearing header, Bridge came short towards his own box to pick up the second ball. It looked to be a harmless situation for Wellington, having kept three players back. However this all changed when Bridge laid the ball off to a flying Brosque. Within seconds, the fleet-footed Brosque had progressed over halfway. His teammates instinctively knew this was a moment to attack the opposition's weakness and five other players joined in as they outnumbered Wellington's now measly three players. Once in a crossing position on the left edge of the box, Brosque had Gan,

Bridge, Aloisi and Kisel to aim for in the middle with Corica on the edge of the box for a cutback. It was Aloisi who out-jumped one of two Wellington players to head home and wrap up the three points.

Sydney FC was a team built to thrive. They were able to structure their counter attacks for maximum efficiency and to take advantage of the spaces left by their less organised opponents. By playing a 4-4-2 diamond, they would always maintain a numerical advantage in the centre of the park and would funnel opposition attacks through the middle in order to regain possession in midfield.

Once the ball was won, Lavicka's men broke with clockwork-like movements: Bridge would come short towards the ball to receive a pass in transition and also to drag an opposition centre back out of position. His strike partner Brosque would then sprint in behind to stretch the play and exploit the spaces created by Bridge. The nearest fullback – Shannon Cole on the right or Byun Sung-Hwan on the left – would burst beyond his midfielders to provide width to the attack. Finally, the opposite midfielder in the diamond and Corica as the furthest forward would join in the attack to add extra numbers.



If the ball was won on the right, Bridge would come short, Brosque would run in behind, the opposite midfielder would join in going forward and the nearest fullback would add width.

These patterns were showcased a 2-1 home win against Newcastle Jets in Round 7, despite missing key players. Sydney FC had been struck with injuries to Kisel, Keller, Aloisi and McFlynn so Sebastian Ryall filled in at centre back next to Simon Colosimo while youngsters Gan and Adam Casey played on either side of the midfield four with Musialik at the base and Corica at the tip of the diamond. Yet the understrength side was still able to control the game against the Jets and both goals came from their structured counter attacks.

With Newcastle's Fabio Vignaroli in possession near the centre circle, Gan was quick to squeeze the play and apply pressure on the ball. This forced Vignaroli into a rushed square pass which was cut out by Musialik. Instantly, Musialik played a first time forward pass into the feet of Bridge who had come short. As Bridge turned to face forward, Brosque sprinted in behind and stretched Newcastle's defence, allowing his strike partner to carry the ball into the box and score.

In the second half, a near identical situation occurred. This time it was Casey who forced a rushed pass in the centre of midfield and Musialik was there to pounce and pass first time to Gan. When Bridge dropped short and dragged a defender away, Brosque raced in behind to receive Gan's first time pass before being brought down by the onrushing Ben Kennedy in goals. It was pounce, pass, pass, penalty and Sydney FC regained the lead when Corica slotted the ball home from the spot.

Soon after, Sydney inflicted pain on their rivals Melbourne Victory, scoring three goals in five minutes in a famous win at Etihad Stadium. It was again their counter attacking ability that shone as Sydney looked organised and controlled without the ball before forcing turnovers and taking advantage of their opponent's openness.

After taking the lead via an Alex Brosque header in the 14th minute, Mark Bridge doubled the lead two minutes later after another clinical counter attack. Corica and Kisel had double teamed Archie Thompson in the middle of the park forcing a turnover. As soon as Sydney FC had regained possession, Bridge dropped short and Brosque sprinted in behind on the left, dragging with him Adrian Leijer. McFlynn then bombed forward from midfield to receive in space which forced Kevin Muscat to step out from defence. Once this had happened, Bridge spun and sprinted in behind Victory's stretched backline to receive the ball, turn inside Rodrigo Vargas and finish into the bottom corner.

It wasn't long before it was 3-0 when Sydney regained possession on the left and quickly shifted the ball over to Kisel on the right of the diamond. With Kisel in possession, Cole overlapped determinedly to received a pass in behind on the right and crossed to Bridge who had peeled away to the back post.

'We were very efficient on counter attacks and also defensively too because we were very structured,' said McFlynn. 'On the break, if Byun went past me on the left then I would fill in for him and Karol Kisel would get forward but if we were going down the right with Shannon Cole then Karol fill in at right back so any recovery

run would be maximum 30-35 metres. It was all about working together as a team but that was drilled into us day in day out so we knew that as soon as a fullback went past you that it was your role to fill in.'

This kind of organisation ensured Sydney constantly provided threats on the break – with two strikers and midfield runners getting into the box for crosses from the fullbacks – while also ensuring they maintained control should possession be lost.

It was no surprise that Sydney FC's two most important goals of the 2009–10 season – Aloisi's winner in a Valentine's Day clash against Victory to decide the Premier's Plate and Bridge's goal in the grand final – came from counter attacks, such was their efficiency. But in their first season under Lavicka Sydney FC were not just one trick ponies – they also looked to maintain possession and build from the back wherever a counter attack wasn't on.

When playing out from the back, Musialik, at the base of the midfield diamond, would come short towards his centre backs Keller and Colosimo which allowed both Byun and Cole to push high and wide. Sydney FC then had the option of switching the play out to either one of their fullbacks or to try and pass incisively through the middle of the park. This would happen when Bridge would drop short to receive a pass straight into his feet. Receiving with his back to goal, Bridge would bounce the ball to one of his midfield teammates who were now facing forward. Once a midfielder was facing forward, the respective fullback would then overlap and Sydney would then get runners into the box.

It proved to be successful and Sydney struck a balance, conceding just 23 times on their way to the Premier's Plate before edging Melbourne Victory in a penalty shootout in the grand final.

Their success in the first season under Lavicka was not only due to being set up to control every phase of the game – set pieces, in possession, out of possession and, of course, the transition moments, Lavicka knew the importance of controlling every factor

possible off the pitch and placed extra focus on how training sessions were structured, analysing the opposition and important factors such as diet, fitness and psychology.

Dr Craig Duncan, now part of the Socceroos' set up, was brought in during preseason as Head of Human Performance. Not only did Lavicka want his side to be more structured than everyone else, he also wanted them to be fitter than everyone else. Duncan also helped to closely monitor the diet and hydration of players while, at the request of young assistant Tony Popovic, yoga was added to the players' training routine.

Lavicka also added an extra element of professionalism to game day preparation, taking his team to hotels the day of home games to ensure the players were in a controlled environment and able to fully prepare for a match as a group without distractions.

'It was little bits of attention to detail he [Lavicka] brought in that were new,' said McFlynn. 'He was big on the psychology of sport so he made us wear suits to away games. He thought that if you walked into an away stadium with suits instead of tracksuits, we were already different and more professional than everyone else. He really made us believe that: we're Sydney FC, this is the biggest club and we do things differently.'

Lavicka certainly did things differently. In a competition that was previously characterised by constant transitions, one Foster described as 'chaotic', Lavicka was able to shift the focus towards structure and organisation. His 4-4-2 diamond system thrived and added unprecedented emphasis on structure and controlling every phase of play. Teams across the country soon also shifted their focus after the success of Lavicka's Sydney, an important stage in the evolution of the A-League over 10 seasons.

Yet when we think of and discuss the progression of the A-League, Lavicka is largely ignored from the conversation. It is Postecoglou one season later that is seen as the revolutionary force behind the league's development. This is primarily because Postecoglou was able to achieve unprecedented success with Brisbane and did so playing a style Australian teams had struggled

to grasp. But that wasn't to say the league wasn't moving in the right direction. Perhaps a more accurate description of the 10 years of the A-League is that the league was developing steadily, Lavicka was the vital cog that shifted the focus towards organisation and Postecoglou accelerated the process beyond imagination.

And that theory fits the fact that the A-League was already constantly and steadily progressing from seasons one to four as players became accustomed to being full-time professionals, as better foreign players joined and as facilities and funding improved. It also recognises the important but often forgotten role of Vitezslav Lavicka.

'I thought Lavicka did really well to organise the league, I think he was the start of this rapid progress,' said Foster. 'The level of organisation he built with Sydney is similar to what Popa [Popovic] has done with the Wanderers and Popa has certainly learned from Lavicka. I think every coach brought into the league has to elevate the standards somehow or bring something new and I think Lavicka did that.'

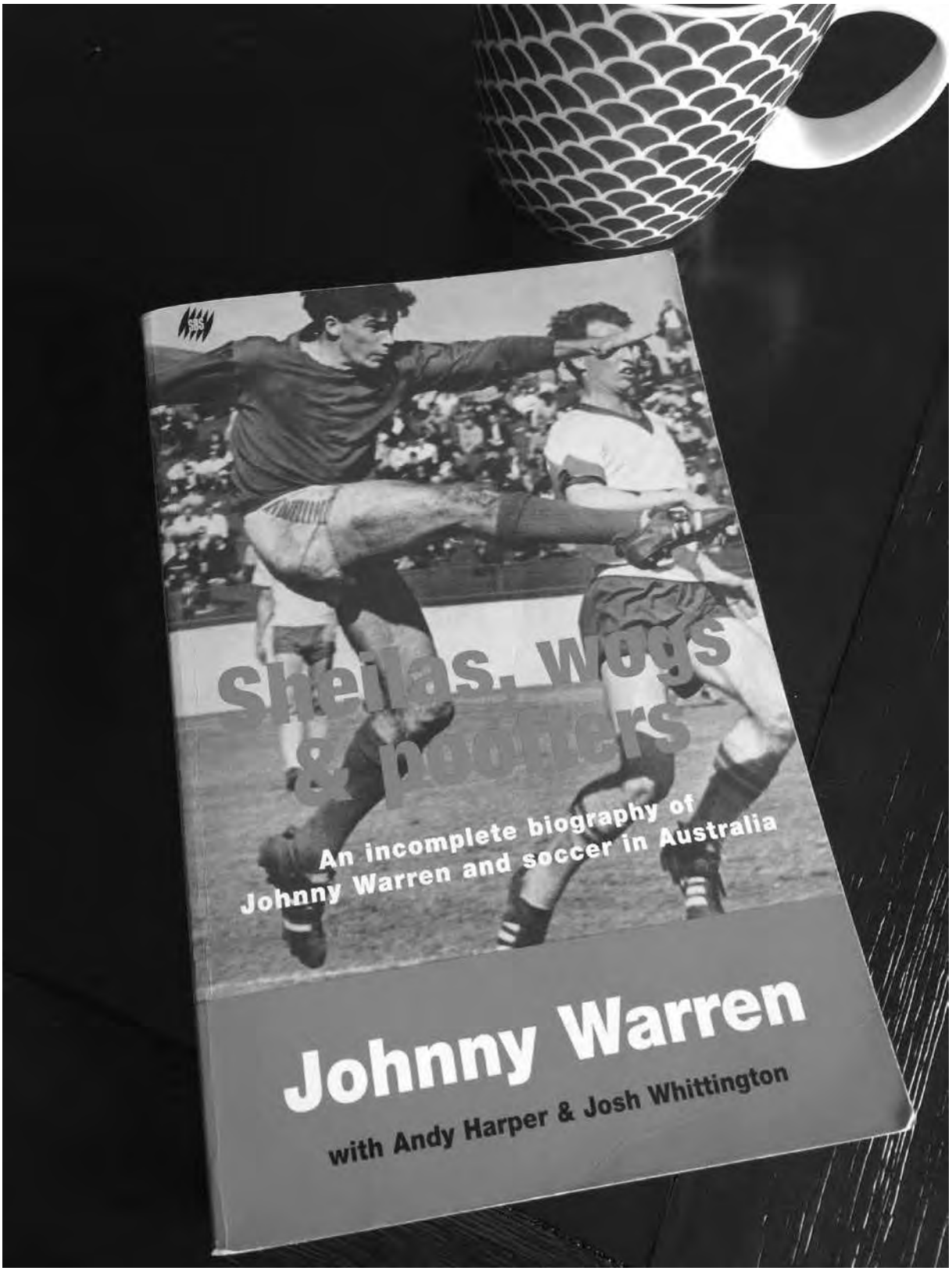
By analysing the 10 years of the A-League simplistically as a 'Postecoglou Revolution' we diminish or outright ignore the important progress before and coaches who played an important role in improving the standards of domestic football.

'I think his time at Sydney has been a bit underestimated,' said Corica. 'Obviously in his first season he did really well, in the next two not so well, but as a coach he was very structured and very organised. I was lucky to play under him in that first year and then also to be an assistant coach under him because I then saw the planning side of things and I saw just how organised he was.'

Lavicka's second season in the A-League, in which Sydney FC struggled and were usurped by Postecoglou's Brisbane Roar, has somewhat tarnished his reputation. But he remains an important catalyst for the improvement of the A-League in its first 10 seasons. He was able to shift the thinking towards team organisation, structures and systems of play. He also added new levels of emphasis on opposition analysis, meticulously structuring

training sessions and maximising on field performances through ways that are commonplace now.

'We probably would have applauded the work of Lavicka a lot more if he was a local coach,' Popovic tells in *A-League: The Inside Story of the Tumultuous First Decade*. 'He certainly didn't get enough credit that he deserved. I'm sure he is appreciated a lot more outside of this country than what he is here.'


Sheilas, Wogs & poofters
An incomplete biography of Johnny Warren and soccer in Australia
Johnny Warren
with Andy Harper & Josh Whittington

AUSTRALIAN SOCCER ON THE EDGE OF LEGITIMACY

IAN SYSON

SOCCER HAS CONTENDED WITH DOGS, DEMONS AND destabilisers since the first spherical balls rolled off the ships in the 1830s. The game's legitimacy has been questioned by those outside the game ever since it was first advocated in the 1860s and while its first fleeting steps of organisation were taken in the 1870s. Dozens of reasons – including the game's putative foreignness, feebleness, degenerate participants, absence of masculinity, wealth, corruption, colonialism and imperialism – have been used to cast doubt upon soccer's right (or need) to exist on this continent.

As a result the quality of belonging felt by many of the game's adherents has been diminished in most places in Australia for most of that history. A sense of inclusion and the possession of what Anne-Marie Fortier calls 'terrains of commonality' (for example, established clubhouses, enclosed playing grounds, and regular and effective media space) have too rarely been felt and held by soccer in Australia. It would be fair to say that sometimes a kind of embarrassment or even shame has attached to a commitment to the game. To be a soccer player, supporter or advocate is to adopt

an uncanny position in relation to many perceptions of Australian mainstream culture.

The reasons for these perceptions relate strongly to memory. Australian soccer is a game that suffers from forgetfulness both generally and within the game as well. Soccer has been present at key moments in Australian history yet the broader culture and the game itself simply do not remember. So reactivating memory is also a key to the solution of soccer's problems of historiographical invisibility.

This reactivation is not an easy process, even on a sheer practical level. While the recent digitisation of Australian newspaper archives has made the task somewhat easier than it might have been, a nonetheless significant amount of trawling for previously ignored counter-narratives has been performed in the research of our history.

But the difficulties are more than practical. Lynn Abrams warns:

> History-making, or the construction of views of the past in any society, is the product of a struggle of a particular interpretation of that event or period. And when a hegemonic view emerges it generally excludes or mutes alternative or counter interpretations. Those who hold alternative interpretations have difficulty narrating or expressing their memories because they cannot fit them into the dominant narrative, the collective memory.

The telling of soccer's story is inevitably a political task, a reactivation of memory that will challenge and upset dominant narratives and those who hold them dear.

Organised soccer is over 130 years old in Australia. At the time of writing, nearly 500,000 adult Australians participate in organised outdoor soccer competitions, higher participation levels than any other team sport. At its elite level, soccer is capable of generating massive television viewing statistics. A Socceroos

game at the World Cup, for example, is one of the high-water marks in Australian televised sports viewing (even in the middle of the night). While soccer tends to be the second football code wherever it is played, it nonetheless has the kind of demographic Australian coverage that the other football codes envy. Soccer's numerical strengths (and some of its cultural weaknesses) are indicated by its status as the 'go to' game for Australia-wide advertising narratives that represent children at energetic play.

One long-standing frustration for the proponents of soccer in Australia is that many of these tens of thousands of juniors end up playing (and supporting) other codes of football at the senior level – this drift may well be the game's fundamental problem as it tries to establish itself on a stable footing in Australian sporting life. At the elite level, Australian Rules footballers like Peter McKenna, Adam Goodes and Peter Matera were good junior soccer players. Andrew Johns starred with the round ball as a junior in Newcastle and Preston Campbell loved playing soccer as a boy. He left the game to follow his good friend Nathan Blacklock to rugby league. Each of these sportsmen made the switch in their teens. This is a trend that leaves many soccer supporters wondering if their game might have had more success had those players and others stayed in the game. The words, 'He would have been a great soccer player!' have often passed their lips.

So this game, even with such apparent comparative advantages, has fared badly in Australia. Since the 1860s, organised soccer has sought a place in Australian society only to be rebuffed and rejected as a foreign game, a threat, sometimes even a menace to Australian masculinity and life in general. Soccer has endured sustained media myopia offset by frequent outbursts of intense and spiteful attention. Johnny Warren encapsulated this anti-soccer mentality in the title of his memoir, *Sheilas, Wogs and Poofters*.

These were the kinds of people who played soccer in Australia (though Warren might have added Poms and children). The game was seen as effeminate, foreign and for homosexual men. While Warren's title doesn't quite represent either the totality

or the subtlety of opposition, it does capture the vituperation and the spirit of a different age. He relates the 'daunting image, still prominent in [his] memory' of a ticker-tape parade for the Socceroos in Sydney in 1969 in the context of an otherwise positive if not rapturous welcome home.

> I had taken my allocated place in one of the sports cars which had been organised for the event. The cavalcade was snaking its way through the streets and turned a corner. This one particular corner, like so many of its kind in Sydney, was adorned by a pub. Wooing the punters to drink from its kegs were pictures on its outer wall of rugby, cricket and horse racing. True-blue Aussie sports. Spilling out of the pub's doors were tank-topped, steel-cap-booted, tattooed workers quenching their thirst after the dust of the day's work. 'Fuckin' poofters,' some hooted at us. 'Dago bastards,' followed others. The odd projectile was hurled our way. Needless to say, I had, in my life, felt much safer than I did during that parade.

The recent relative successes of soccer in Australia might tend to suggest that the bigoted attitude that confronted Warren is a thing of the past. The way that the A-League and well-attended international fixtures have elbowed themselves some room in the mainstream of Australian sport media indicates a new-found respect for the game has been established. However, the battle may not be over. Even when the vulgar and coarse resentment is peeled away, a core of repulsion, sometimes principled, more often irrational, remains.

The former comes from a writer like Martin Flanagan who believes that any weakening of Australian Rules football because of soccer's rise will damage local culture, already embattled by the manifold forces of globalisation. Flanagan respects soccer and other codes of football but he makes his priorities clear.

> [Australian Rules football] has a unique place, not only in Australian sport, but in Australian culture which, in my experience, is obvious to outsiders. I can admire the Australian rugby union team and enjoy watching them play, but at the end of the day it is a British game they're playing. Australian football is a marvellous sporting invention that found its way into the hearts of people and infiltrated other aspects of their lives so that it became something by which you knew families and suburbs and towns and, more recently with the national competition, different parts of Australia.

While this argument is one that deserves notice, largely because it is true for much of Australia, it is flawed in relation to Sydney and broad regions of the two northern states of NSW and Queensland, something that Flanagan tacitly admits with his vague use of 'different parts of Australia' in his final sentence. The problem is that Australian Rules is an irrelevance for many Australians, even many of those who are interested in sport. They do not play it; they do not watch it; they fail to understand it. Some hate it. Nor have they experienced the purported social benefits of the game to which Flanagan refers. Significantly, in one of the heartlands of Australian mythology, what might be called the Waltzing Matilda country of outback Queensland, Australian Rules was until recently an utterly foreign game and did not belong.

Flanagan does not allow for the fact that the so-called 'British games' (the Rugby codes, cricket and soccer) have also given and continue to give meaning and structure to the lives of many Australians. And unless he is willing to say that these experiences are inferior to or less authentic than the social meaning obtained through Australian Rules, or that these Australians aren't true Australians, then Flanagan is guilty of making a national generalisation out of a regional truth.

In many regions and towns soccer has a continuous history of more than 100 years where the game has been, for generations

of Australians and waves of migrants, an important pillar of their communities. In Flanagan's home state of Tasmania, the South Hobart Football Club has a more than 100-year history and has played at the same home ground for almost all of that time. The club belongs in and to the community in ways that Flanagan would admire in relation to an Australian Rules club.

Representing a very different perspective is a writer like Michael Duffy, whose article, 'Jig is up – give World Cup the boot' published shortly after Australia's good performance in the 2006 World Cup, is a checklist of predictable prejudice that masks his own failure to understand the game. Boring, not enough scoring, should be allowed to use hands, too much play acting. He talks about an experience of watching the World Cup that, given his attitudes and the second-person persona adopted, is probably either second-hand or made up.

> You rose from your bed in the early hours to spend an hour and a half watching the ball move from one player to another several hundred times without passing through the white posts at either end of the field more than once or twice. It was like golf without the excitement.

If Flanagan adopts a left-nationalist position in worrying about soccer's globalising effects, Duffy comes from the free-market right and argues the very opposite. Inspired by the American academic economist Allen Sanderson, Duffy suggests that Australians are very much like Americans and their resistance to soccer should be seen as exemplary.

He cites Sanderson who believes that those Americans who support soccer 'are uncomfortable with competitions that produce winners and losers, and soccer appeals to their egalitarian, risk-averse streak. The same crowd usually also can be counted on to oppose globalisation'.

Duffy also sees soccer is also a force of political correctness: 'Lots of parents force their children to play football for reasons of

social engineering: they want to make their boys more like girls and their girls more like boys.' For Duffy, men's sport is about upper body strength. As a sport that disallows the use of hands, soccer therefore runs against the spirit of unfettered competition that characterises the true sporting contest.

This is both silly and damaging but it does point to something typical in Duffy's politics. He sits within the great right-wing tradition of old men in power urging on strong healthy young men to do their dirty martial work for them. His is also a politics of denial insofar as he articulates a cynical, calculated and offensive dismissal of the millions of Australians interested in soccer with no attempt to mitigate the psychological, political or moral implications of his insults.

Despite their having completely antagonistic perspectives on most other cultural-political matters, Flanagan and Duffy end up on the same side in this argument. This speaks greatly of the general antipathy towards soccer in Australia, particularly from middle-aged men with positions of some cultural influence.

Duffy and Flanagan did not invent their perspectives. They inherited them. Their pronouncements on soccer have a genealogy that extends back to the 1880s in Australia. And there are very good reasons for the resentment of soccer. The game's reputation has legitimately suffered through fan violence and farcical organisational corruption around the world.

Throughout world history it has been variously held responsible for the collapses of moral order and collective political will. It has been a game of the economic coloniser, imposing itself on or being taken up by indigenes who have thereby lost contact with their native customs. In Britain of ancient times, its forebear (folk football, which is arguably an important precursor of all football codes) was even outlawed by monarchs afraid of the game's impact on their fighting forces.

Each of these historical attitudes relates directly or indirectly to

the main source of contemporary vilification – 'soccerphobia', the fear of one particular code of football, Association football and its supposed potential to damage national, regional and local cultures. The loudest bastions of soccerphobia are, curiously, found in Anglophone countries with a long and direct colonial connection to the British Isles – the birthplace of Association football. Australia, the US, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand and South Africa all house strong and entrenched cultures of soccerphobia.

In three and one-half of these countries, soccer is seen either as a threat to local and established games or as a game that cannot assimilate because of its foreignness or unsuitability. Ireland, Canada, the US and southern and western Australia have developed regional variations of football (or other sports) that are assumed to be indigenous expressions of nationality – assumptions that are often flawed.

For example, baseball's claims to indigenous status ignore the fact that it stems directly from games imported from Europe. American sports historians Andrei Markovits and Lars Rensmann suggest that most 'historians agree that this game was a descendant of an English ball-and-stick game known as "rounders"'. Often, claims of indigeneity rest more on politically expedient assertions of a given sport's purported relation to national independence than they do on historical fact.

In New Zealand, white South Africa and the Australian states of Queensland and NSW, the local/imported divide is not as relevant – or at least it has less basis to be. The dominant football codes (rugby union or rugby league) in each of these states or countries have clear British origins. Here, the disparagement of soccer tends to focus on questions of courage, masculinity and even sexuality. Historically, Association football has been seen as a game for degenerates, weaklings and 'poofters' across these sections of the soccerphobic world.

In recent times, the reality of sport-as-industry has been clarified. While organised elite sport for the past 120 years or more has had the element of profit-and-loss at its heart, for much

of that history the ruling amateur mythology of sport provided a smokescreen, placing the economic realm into the category of a 'necessary evil'. Contemporary sports discourse happily brings questions of economics to bear. This newer general consciousness of sport as business is one which perceives any attempt to grow a sporting market necessarily involves a diminution of another and competition between sports becomes a legitimate subject matter for sports discussion. Soccer's attempts to gain 'market share' in those regions, like Australia, where historically it has been a subdominant sport are one more (economic) basis for soccerphobia, a position which can dip into the toolbox of cultural soccerphobia as required.

To leave it at this would be to allow soccer to cry victim without accepting a deal of responsibility. Soccer often has only itself to blame. While the game has risen and fallen subject to external pressures, it has, in perhaps equal measure, been self-sabotaged by its internecine feuds and unfathomable incompetences across its history in Australia. For much of the period since 1958, the governing structure has encouraged horse trading and corrupt politics by allowing the tail to wag the dog as the game moved from club and state to national and international levels.

One could also point to historical factors. Soccer has regularly collapsed under the massive weight of war and economic depression and often resurged on migrant tides. And while history has not been kind to the game in Australia, it might be said: 'In sport you make your own history!' In a sense soccer has not been kind to its own history. It has not often made a good fist of becoming a narrative point of Australian history. Nor has it done a very good job of remembering the times when it actually did.

This is the problem around which my research turns: Australian soccer has failed to rise to the level of mythology, legend and story in Australia. Philip Mosely and Bill Murray put it another way: 'it has not entered the Australian soul'. Roy Hay claims that 'there has

been a failure to make the game Australian'. It has not managed to insert itself positively into the narratives that Australians tell themselves about themselves. This is the basis upon which it is possible to utter an apparent falsity – that Australian soccer is the game that never happened.

Even though there continue to be countless moments of individuals, teams and organisations seeming to play and organise soccer matches and competitions, the game has never really happened in and for itself. It has been an instead game and a nearly game, a counter-attraction or curtain-raiser to the main game wherever and whenever it has been played. Australians have played and watched soccer as a digression, a replacement, a substitute, a surrogate, a next-best thing at best, when they would rather be doing something else, somewhere else.

So games of soccer that were very much played, and won (or drawn) did not 'happen' in the sense that they did not register as having happened as significant moments of Australian behaviour. Like mirages, they appeared on the horizon and vanished as suddenly as they emerged, not even to be consigned to the scrapheap of history but almost to disappear, leaving little but unsettling personal memories and a thin archival trace.

Australian soccer is a game on the edge, literally and metaphorically. It is a foreign game and has remained so for all of the 140 years or more that Australians have been playing it. Indeed, it is sometimes a 'wicked foreign game' that menaces and threatens to overrun Australian society, steal our land and brainwash and enfeeble our children. Its values and practices are 'other' and the game has periodically been asked to go back whence it came.

When it does find a temporary residence here it is often on the edge of the comfort zones of our suburbs and towns, on grounds built on industrial wastelands and recently reclaimed rubbish tips. Australian soccer has had to fight and scrap against more permanent and established residents for every piece of land to which it has access. Only rarely has such land become a settled home for the game. Freud might have described the condition

of Australian soccer as *unheimlich*, in acknowledgement of its homeless and uncanny presence in Australian sporting culture.

Australian soccer is a game on the edge of attention, often languishing in the shadows cast by bigger edifices, silenced by the white noise of mainstream sports trivia. Mainstream media outlets down the years have rarely supplied good coverage of the game (peak moments aside), usually relying on the nincompoopism of the circular argument: 'We don't cover it because there is little interest. Australians don't follow soccer', thereby simultaneously confessing and justifying their failure to lead or create that interest or follow whatever interest that does exist.

Newspaper and other media audiences have been reminded and reminded since the game's codification more than 150 years ago about how little they know about this foreign and 'brand-new' game, soccer, leaving those who consider they do know the game feeling like uninvited guests.

Soccer sits on the edge of history in Australia. It is never a core theme for the historian – though perhaps sometimes an interesting sideline (or Greek chorus!) to the main story. Historians refer habitually to its novelty, difference and foreignness. Sporting histories are little better. While able to respect the game as a legitimate object of research, they are still written under the sway of the myths of soccer's marginality.

Sport historians find it harder to see soccer as a subject of research. Even those histories that profess to tell the story of the game from the inside can be diverted by the all-pervading mythologies that have built up around sport and culture in Australia. They are liable to take on board non-negotiable truths that rule the game out of the game. Some soccer historians have been complicit in their own marginalisation, happy to provide comments from the sideline rather than fight their way into the commentary box. Those who have made it in have found their tenure fleeting and too easily forgotten.

Australian soccer is on the edge of Australia – again in two senses. It is only played around the edges, in the big cities, home to

the migrants, that leaf-fringed demesne despised by the architects of bush nationalism. AD Hope's 'Australia' has this biting stanza:

> And her five cities, like five teeming sores,
> Each drains her: a vast parasite robber-state
> Where second-hand Europeans pullulate
> Timidly on the edge of alien shores.

While not about soccer, Hope's poem is about its place, the 'second-hand Europeans' who live there and that place's abject relation to the spiritual centre of Australia. The rugged heart, the heroic source of real Australia is not a place of soccer.

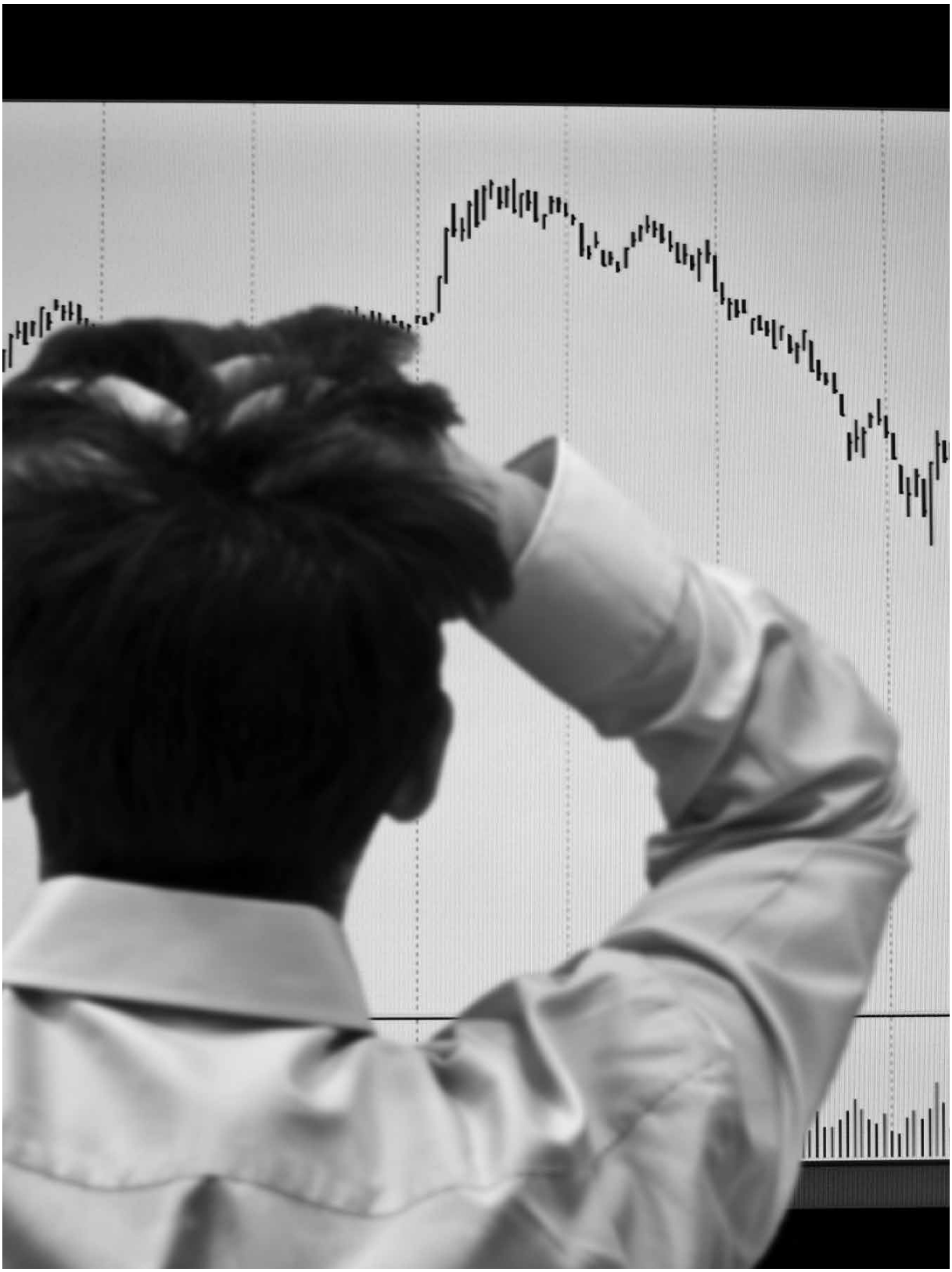
Australian literature, legends and mythologies are constructed as soccer-free narratives and the game's intrusion in them is rare and ever dissonant when it does occur. Australian soccer has no Cazaly up there with whom its players can go – whether that be to popular adulation or to their deaths in the field of battle. Unlike Australian Rules, it has no 'six-foot recruit from Eaglehawk' to provide its 'hope of salvation'.

There are many Australian soccer players who have 'come down from the bush' but the game has access to no mythological narratives in which to accommodate them. The game might be able to boast Kasey Wehrman, an Aboriginal hard man from Cloncurry in North-West Queensland, but it cannot point to any archetypal bush heroes in its pantheon of greasy wogs and sneaky Scotsmen alongside whom he can sit.

Nor does Wehrman have any tangible Indigenous notables to provide fatherly mentoring. The deeds of Bondi Neal, Quilp, Charles Perkins, Gordon Briscoe, John Moriarty, Buddy Newchurch and Harry Williams could shine down the ages as beacons to young Aboriginal players because they were genuine stars of Australian soccer, a game to which Aboriginal players were sometimes welcomed in ways other codes of football found difficult.

Yet these moments, like many others, have vanished from public perception and Aboriginal players are largely absent in

the stories of Australian soccer. Ultimately Australian soccer is a game on the edge of legitimacy, a game at the edge of itself. And while these arguments inhabit a cultural conversation that can accommodate the perversion of logic and sense that allows the nation's most played team game to be forgotten or, at best, figured as unAustralian, marginal and unbelonging, it will be ever thus.



HOW THE GFC CUT A SWATHE THROUGH THE A-LEAGUE

JOHN STENSHOLT

THOUGH OTHERS SUCH AS FRANK LOWY AND HOLLYWOOD STAR Anthony La Paglia took the headlines, one name often forgotten among the owners of Sydney FC – or 'Bling FC' as they were quickly dubbed – is Phil Green. In 2005–06, when the A-League began with Sydney FC winning the first grand final, Green was at his peak. As head of global investment and advisory firm Babcock & Brown, Green was one of the best known, and successful, men in the Sydney business community.

Cheap credit, insatiable investor demand for all sorts of financial products and a booming stock market had seen Green and his colleagues become spectacularly rich. Babcock & Brown, like its rival Macquarie Bank, made a fortune from charging investors huge fees to make their money in property, managed funds, aircraft leasing and power, transport and water via public private partnerships. It also advised on structured finance deals, leases, debt placements, hedging, securitisation and operated a leasing business for equipment the world over.

In short, Green was a financial whiz making money while the world boomed.

Given the times, it was hardly surprising that may of Green's fellow A-League club owners had made considerable fortunes.

The Australian economy was, like much of the world, galloping along as a heady mixture of cheap credit and opportunistic entrepreneurism drove business to unprecedented heights. The property market was booming, as was the financial services market for entrepreneurs like Green. And much of it was being done on large borrowings as business identities bet the good times would keep going.

Con Constantine had made his fortune, at one stage estimated at over $150 million, from his ownership of the huge Parklea Markets in Sydney's west. He would then expand on that by undertaking property developments and buying regional newspapers in and around Newcastle.

For Constantine, a 'wog-ocker' character according to player agent Tony Rallis, it was a natural extension to buy struggling National Soccer League side Newcastle Breakers, later to morph into A-League team Newcastle Jets. Constantine lived simply and was more comfortable having a drink with the locals than spending time at the top end of town, as former Jets director of football Remo Nogorotto recalled. 'Con ran [Newcastle] on a smell of an oily rag,' said Nogarotto. 'We spent the salary cap [on players, but] the director of football was quasi CEO, quasi director of football. I went and got the ice for players if I had to.'

Constantine was not one for bureaucracies, telling the *Sydney Morning Herald*'s Michael Cockerill: 'Regardless of what people think, we run the club professionally. We have good people in there, and when there's a problem, it takes 20 minutes to sort it out. That's the way I like it.'

The men who were charged with running the A-League – Matt Carroll and later Archie Fraser – both had to deal with some complaints about Constantine's payment methods. 'We had some issues; well, the players certainly had some issues about super and

things of that nature,' said Carroll. 'But he eventually got there on those things. But his idea was to hold out till the end.' Past players, staff and coaches had sued Constantine over back pay.

As frustrating as Constantine's business methods might have been, there was an overwhelming amount of respect and admiration for the man due to his passion for and commitment to the game. Cockerill reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that it was costing Constantine $5 million a season to bankroll the club, a fact not lost on the players. 'He put a lot of money behind the Jets,' said former Jets goalkeeper Ante Covic. 'No matter what kind of person he is, or disagreements we might have with him, he did love the game and did invest his own money. I can't question him on that side.'

Constantine's popularity peaked in 2008 when Newcastle topped intrastate rivals Central Coast Mariners 1-0 in the grand final. It capped a fantastic year for the club on and off the field, as parochial Novocastrians flocked to watch an exciting team play. FFA even broke protocol by allowing Constantine onto the podium to lift the A-League trophy. 'At the time everyone was proud that we won it,' Covic said. 'That was my first grand final, a championship win in Australia. I couldn't care less about what happened or whether anyone had to say about it. It was a proud moment for me, it was a great thing for the club. [Constantine] wanted the club to succeed and brought the club its first championship trophy.'

Constantine lifted the trophy at the height of the economic boom as the 2008 *BRW* Rich List chronicled. The wealth of the richest Australians, including FFA chairman Frank Lowy and his fellow directors John Singleton, Ron Walker and Phil Wolanski, reached record levels. There was a record 38 billionaires and the 200 listed were worth on average almost $700 million each. Green's $289 million fortune sat comfortably above the $200 million entry cut-off.

However, warning signs were beginning to flash. Several financial engineers, including David Coe of Allco and MFS Global Equity duo Phil Adams and Michael King, departed the list. The *BRW* Rich List was published three months after Constantine's team had won the grand final, and it would not get any better as the world was suddenly introduced to phrases such as sub-prime lending, mortgage-backed securities and collateralised debt obligation. None of it was good news for the world economy, the Australian economy or the A-League.

While the stock market was entering a decline by mid-2008, having peaked the previous year, the downfall accelerated rapidly in October – just after season four of the A-League was getting underway.

Green and his Babcock & Brown cohorts were one of the most high-profile victims in Australia. Only weeks after the 2008 Rich List was published in late May, Babcock shares started falling. With 45% of the shares owned by its executives, fortunes were lost rapidly. By December, Green and his colleagues were wiped out as Babcock shares lost 99% value. The following March the company was in voluntary administration and five months later liquidation.

Its balance sheet was stacked with long-term illiquid assets like real estate and shareholdings in related companies, all financed by short-term debt. When the debt was unable to be refinanced, Babcock was in huge trouble and never recovered. The poster boys for the economic boom in Australia were gone.

Newcastle kicked off the 2008–09 season with a 1-1 draw against Central Coast in a grand final replay. It would take until round five before they won their first game, by which time the economic crisis was well and truly unfolding. Heavily exposed to the sub-prime market, American bank Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy. The financial market was incredulous and panic swept the globe. More American banks collapsed, and European countries like Ireland – with a previously booming property market – slipped

into recession. Suddenly credit dried up as banks were forced to tighten their lending practices fearing they would be unable to borrow money from overseas.

Midway through October 2008, seven rounds into the A-League season, Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd and his treasurer Wayne Swan took the unprecedented step of guaranteeing $700 billion worth of bank deposits. The move helped stave off a recession, along with a further economic stimulus package worth $10.4 billion.

Stock markets around the world plunged, banks struck trouble when unable to gain funding and governments desperately tried to stimulate their economies and stave off market collapses and job losses. The following February, the Labor government – who had a year earlier backed Australia's 2018 and 2022 World Cup bids by providing FFA $45 million in funding – announced another stimulus package worth $42 billion, including $26 billion of infrastructure projects.

That move came just after Melbourne Victory had won their second grand final in three seasons with a 1-0 win over Adelaide United. While Australia as a nation was to escape the worst of the economic crisis, it was only a matter of time until the entrepreneurs that owned many clubs were hit hard.

The property sector bore plenty of brunt, especially in Queensland where the Gold Coast market had enjoyed a stellar run. In fact, the GFC claimed its first A-League victim on the glitter strip before a team had entered the competition. FFA chief executive Ben Buckley had been keen for the A-League to expand, buoyed by the competition's successful first few years. That expansion needed to be away from the eight markets the league was already in, and attention turned to regions such as the Gold Coast.

Property developer Fred Taplin's Gold Coast Galaxy consortium led the pack of prospective expansion clubs with what appeared

the most impressive bid. Ex-Sydney FC chairman Walter Bugno, by then running Tabcorp's Jupiters Casino at Broadbeach, was employed as chairman, and used his football contacts to help build the consortium team. He approached Central Coast Mariners' majority shareholder, Peter Turnbull, to provide introductions to wealthy Gold Coast property developers who might invest in the new franchise.

Bugno recruited former Queensland Roar coach Miron Bleiberg; agent Lou Sticca introduced the pair. The Galaxy consortium was making lots of noise in the media, and the partnership seemed a perfect match. 'At the time it was generating a lot of publicity,' Bleiberg said. 'I was a media darling, and people, they like my style.'

The club secured the rights to use the 25,000-seat stadium under construction in Robina, signed a lease for a training venue at Runaway Bay, and chose yellow and blue as the club colours. FFA was impressed by the business model, with Taplin planning to use profits from a property development to fund the club's operations, targeting a market that extended over the border to the New South Wales north coast.

It was reported that FFA wanted to rush the club into the 2008–09 season, but Taplin wanted more time to prepare. Buckley was keen to enter the Gold Coast market before the AFL did, even producing a mock fixture list for nine- and 10-team competitions. 'Ben's vision at the time was that we would have the strongest national football [footprint],' said former Professional Footballers Australia chief executive, Brendan Schwab. 'He wanted to expand as soon as possible.'

But with the property market on the Gold Coast – which had boomed as apartment high-rises were rapidly built to go alongside luxury canal-side islands – starting to decline, so did Taplin's business. Suddenly his consortium did not have the funds needed to satisfy a fuming Buckley, who pulled the plug and quickly found

another cashed-up local, mining billionaire Clive Palmer, to fill the void.

Just to make sure, Buckley demanded Palmer provide proof of his ability to fund what would become Gold Coast United. 'They said, "Can you cover the loss of a million bucks?" We sent them a bank statement with a couple of hundred million dollars on it, which was a bit facetious of us, I suppose,' Palmer recalled. 'I said, "Here's one. If you want another one, just contact the bank and they'll give you one from a different account".'

Gold Coast United and Townsville-based North Queensland Fury entered the A-League in season five, which began in August 2009. By then Adelaide United were in disarray, with FFA and an extremely reluctant Buckley forced to take control of the team after owner Nick Bianco had relinquished his licence.

Bianco had enjoyed good times before then. Having been a minority shareholder under his friend Gordon Pickard when the A-League began in 2005, Bianco soon became the biggest shareholder. The team would enjoy success on the field and go all the way to the 2008 Asian Champions League final before losing to Gamba Osaka.

Bianco, a building materials and construction magnate, had a made a big bet the good economic times would keep rolling but had run into financial problems of his own after the property downturn hit his construction supply business. In 2007 his company borrowed $50 million to build a steel facility, but within a short time its cash flow was not servicing the debt and two years later he gave up his football team.

Buckley flew to Adelaide to meet Bianco, only to be told: 'I can't do this anymore, here's the keys.' The FFA boss was flabbergasted but the GFC had claimed another A-League victim.

The man who bankrolled Adelaide during their most successful period faced the media to announce the club was no longer his. When asked by a journalist whether he should have been more

financially prudent with the club, Bianco replied: 'No. I think if you've got something you've got to do it all the way. You've got to do it properly … you don't do anything halfway. It's got to be the best or nothing. That's my view.' Bianco also stated that FFA did not pay him for his licence, and he 'didn't ask for a fee'. 'No, you do that because you love the club, and you do it because it's like a hobby. Like a racehorse, you don't get your money back.'

In September 2011 Bianco Structural Steel went into administration. It might have taken longer than was the case with Bianco in Adelaide, but Jets owner Con Constantine was also being squeezed by his banks regarding the debts his business empire owed. Even FFA was caught in the crossfire as Constantine's lenders tried to garnish the governing body's payments of Newcastle's share of the A-League broadcast rights. FFA chief executive Ben Buckley was forced to meet with the banks and officials from the Australian Tax Office in an effort to keep at least some of the funds flowing directly to the football club to pay player wages.

Matters came to a head as the 2010–11 season began, when Constantine again struggled to raise funds to pay his players' wages. FFA quietly contracted former Stadium Australia boss Ken Edwards to find a buyer for the club. Not surprisingly, he put in a call to a young local businessman whose name had started appearing in the *BRW* Young Rich List – Nathan Tinkler.

Having compiled a billion-dollar fortune in only a few years from a series of successful bets on coal mining assets, Tinkler was now beginning to build a sporting empire. He was to spend more than $300 million establishing a horse racing enterprise Patinack Farm and wanted in on the football codes – especially his beloved rugby league team, the Newcastle Knights.

Edwards thought Tinkler might go for a football team too, and rang the young mining magnate. According to Paddy Manning's biography on Tinkler, *Boganaire*, Tinkler asked Edwards, 'How much do you need?' – $2 million was the reply. Tinkler then said

it would be a pity to lose a Newcastle flagship for the sake of just $2 million. After nearly two weeks of secret negotiations, in September 2010 FFA stripped Constantine of his ownership licence and transferred the club to white knight, Tinkler, for the remainder of the season. Constantine was heartbroken, telling the *Australian* that FFA had stabbed him in the back.

Receivers would later be appointed to Constantine's Almoda Pty Ltd, with a report saying he had spent $18.5 million on the club and owed the banks $55 million. His former football director, Remo Nogarotto, has some sympathy for the man who had overseen Newcastle's 2008 A-League triumph: 'The guy had no fast cars, no flash yachts, lived in a humble home at the back of the Parklea Markets, and the one hobby he had was his football team.'

Six months before Constantine had his club taken from him, a similar situation had unfolded in Townsville, where golf course developer Don Matheson had been North Queensland Fury's initial owner. Matheson had other investors lined up before the team debuted in 2009–10, but the GFC saw several withdraw, leaving him in charge of paying the bills.

It had not taken the players and FFA administrators long to realise that Fury were having major issues. A-League boss Archie Fraser flew to Townsville to assess the books and, comparing them to the club's projections, discovered a massive shortfall. The club lacked the required capital and revenue streams to stay afloat. 'North Queensland Fury, from my view, were underfunded from day one,' said Fraser, who met with Matheson and gave him a frank assessment. Fraser believed the franchise was facing a budget shortfall of $3.5 million to $5 million.

Matheson disputed the claim that he and his team were naive. The club had struggled to attract corporate dollars in their inaugural year, which had coincided with the V8 Supercars coming to town with a new race. The Queensland government put $2.5 million towards the race, which also 'hoovered up all the money',

said Matheson. 'There would just be no money left in companies up there when it came to us asking around. They really took a lot of [corporate] dollars out of the marketplace.'

The owner and his team pressed on in search of sponsors, but were stifled by the non-compete clauses in the A-League participation agreement, which stated that a club's sponsor could not be a direct competitor with FFA's or the league's own corporate partners. 'We had a deal lined up with Emirates to come in as a major sponsor, but it got knocked back because of Qantas,' said Matheson. 'We had a deal with a local shopping centre up there in Townsville, but it got knocked back because of Westfield. So we were already in a tough market, and we needed concessions or some help with that, but they never budged.'

Matheson tried to have the restrictions lifted, or at least relaxed. 'I actually called an owners' meeting about it. I mean, people were saying to the FFA, "We are not in it to make lots of money, but we just want the chance to break even." But they just wouldn't move.'

To minimise costs, the owner looked at moving the club's home games to a smaller stadium in town, but it did not meet the A-League's stadium criteria. 'The stadiums are just so bloody expensive to hire. We had a perfectly good stadium in the Tony Ireland Stadium up the road that I could have hired for $1,500 per match. That would have been a $700,000 turnaround right there. But they wouldn't let us do that.'

North Queensland Fury's average attendance in the first season was 6,723, a figure that many claim could have been higher if some smarter decisions had been made regarding fixturing.

While FFA was unwilling to loosen its participation agreement, it did help prop the club up financially. The *Australian*'s Ray Gatt reported after the conclusion of the 2009–10 regular season that FFA was providing $1.5 million to keep the franchise afloat, and Fraser's worse case projections came

true with Fury losing $5 million. Even though Matheson was losing $50,000 a week, he vowed to the public that he would continue to support the club.

'I could have walked away halfway through that season when it became clear that we were going to be losing money,' he said. 'That's when the FFA stepped in. So I can hardly turn around and have a go at the organisation when they were prepared to step in and do something and help out. That's the thing they did help. But it was hard.'

By the end of March 2010, Matheson had to hand back the licence and is still paying back debts more than five years later: 'I've been paying it off for the last four years, with probably another three to go. The loss was spread over a few [of us] and the FFA wore their fair share, to their credit.'

There were even issues at Queensland Roar, by now known as Brisbane Roar. Despite winning the grand final in season six, Roar's owners – Coffee Club co-founders Emmanuel Drivas, Emmanuel Kokoris and Luxury Paints' Claude Baradel and Serge Baradel – gave up control to FFA after banks put the squeeze on funding anything outside their core business interests.

It would not be until November 2010 that FFA would divest itself of its interest in Adelaide United. North Queensland Fury, after a season under FFA control, would be shut down in early 2011.

Later that year, Wellington Phoenix owner Terry Serepisos – a flamboyant property developer who had built many of the apartment blocks that dotted the New Zealand capital's skyline – was declared bankrupt. He too had been a GFC victim, coming unstuck due to high debt levels. Phoenix's then chief executive, Tony Pignata, believed Serepisos' demise began with his appearance on television's *The Apprentice*. 'He wanted me to go on [it] as well, as one of his [assistants on the desk]. I just thought it was a bad idea. New Zealand is very much like Australia: cut down the tall poppy. In one scene he gets out of the helicopter, into a car

– it probably wasn't even his – the Ferrari. He was flamboyant and people say, "Hang on, this guy owes me [money]".'

Central Coast Mariners, under their property developer chairman Peter Turnbull, also struck trouble later in 2011. Turnbull's business had suffered through the GFC and he was unable to put more funds into the football team, where players would have salaries and superannuation go unpaid.

By then another boom was well and truly underway, this time in the resources sector. Miners such as Andrew 'Twiggy' Forrest would be come national identities and compete with the likes of Gina Rinehart for the top spots on the *BRW* Rich List. Phil Green, that one-time small shareholder in Sydney FC, would not go near to gracing the list again and faded from the business limelight after he gave up his stake in the football club.

A seemingly insatiable appetite from China for Australian iron ore would drive the mining boom, with many investors and commentators hailing the era of the 'super-cycle'. The boom, which began in 2005 before being interrupted by the GFC, started again with renewed vigour that was supposed to last for decades. The huge prices being paid for mining assets saw a new breed of cashed-up entrepreneurs emerge, a list that includes names such as Palmer and Tinkler.

Fuelled by the mining boom, their fortunes were supposed to last forever. Palmer flamboyantly promised to win the league with Gold Coast United and used his billion dollar fortune to buy star players such as Jason Culina, returning from a stellar decade in Europe, and Shane Smeltz.

Tinkler having bought Newcastle Jets quickly put up another $1 million to bring David Beckham and LA Galaxy to town, offered to double the pay of coach Branko Culina and later bought son Jason to the side.

FFA also eventually found a buyer for Brisbane Roar. Buckley cannily noted a newspaper article revealing a scion of the

Indonesian billionaire Bakrie family, which had built much of its fortune in the coal sector, was in Australia looking for mining assets and that the family also had football investments. A deal was done quickly.

But the fate of those trio of mining investors, and Perth Glory's Tony Sage, are for the second half of the A-League's first decade. FFA, having found takers for its problem clubs, was content. Having seen off the worst of the GFC, what could possibly have gone wrong for the league and its club owners from there?



NEWCASTLE FOOTBALL

PHILIP MOSELY

SOCCER IN THE NEWCASTLE DISTRICT HAD BEEN ORGANISED by the Northern British FA since 1887. By 1900 there were 15 teams playing in official competitions and by 1909 28 teams. In 1910 the Wallsend and District British FA was formed and took over from the Northern British FA. In its first year the new body raised the District's number of soccer teams to 52. Four years later, the Wallsend and District British FA was itself superseded by the Northern District British FA. This change achieved some positive and immediate results but, due to World War I, it was not until after 1918 that soccer's popularity in the Newcastle District climbed rapidly. By 1922 official competitions were catering for 63 teams, ranging from adults to under-16s. School teams numbering 44 were registered in under-14, under-15 and under-12 age groups.

CLUBS

Soccer in the Newcastle District was closely associated with coal mining. Adamstown, Minmi, West Wallsend and Wallsend-Plattsburg were the principal areas of recruitment. Before 1919 Merewether also provided numerous players. Of those clubs formed outside these main centres, all were similarly located near a colliery. There were the Dudley-Redhead teams, the Catherine Hill Bay and Swansea teams from the Wallarah mine,

teams from Barnsley, Boolaroo, Holmesville and Teralba and, between 1900–10, teams from the old mines at Broadmeadow. New Lambton became important after World War I.

Of 625 players who played first grade soccer for Newcastle District clubs between 1900 and 1922, 382 (61%) are traceable through electoral rolls. Of these 382, 58.9% were involved in mining operations and 93% were blue-collar workers. White-collar workers were conspicuous by their absence and the small businessman and his local store provided the only variant from the players' miner–labourer mould.

The miners involvement in soccer was principally due to where he was reared. In 1901, 29% of Adamstown's male population was British-born, in New Lambton 29.4%, in Merewether 32.2%, in Plattsburg 28.7% and in Wallsend 22.5%. The figure in Newcastle City in 1901 was 21.8% and in all of NSW 17.9%.

With many British immigrants hailing from industrial–mining areas where soccer was the dominant code of football, it was therefore to be expected that the game would likewise be strong on the Newcastle coalfields. Furthermore, with soccer having been played in the District since 1884, a tradition had been built up. The 1880s generation of immigrants which had established the early clubs may have retired during the 1890s but their sons and others would have been influenced by them in their choice of football code to follow.

The British influence was reinforced during the 1910s when Newcastle received approximately 6,700 immigrants, two-thirds of whom seemed to have been male and who tended to be aged between 20 and 39 years. They were likely absorbed into the steelworks and allied industries, employment in Newcastle during the period shifting from coal mining to heavy industry.

One indication of this was the formation of the Newcastle United FC in 1915. Players were employed by the Broken Hill Proprietary Co. and the state dockyard at Walsh Island. The club's immigrant element was made plain when a British-born versus Australian-born benefit match was promoted to aid the 'Belgian

Fund' three months after the club was formed.

As a general rule, the miners' clubs had only a few teams each. For example, in 1910 Minmi's four clubs fielded only six teams. In 1922 Wallsend had a total of nine teams, excluding schoolboys, but these were from six separate clubs. Groups of players enjoyed organising themselves. Recruited mostly around a particular mine or 'pub' or through a network of old school friends, their teams were an expression of friendship and camaraderie.

An extra factor in this was the way British immigrants, proud of their individual county loyalties, gravitated towards each other. Geordies sought out Geordies and Scots fellow Scots. In Sydney, the picture was much the same when teams formed with such names as Burns Anniversary, the Lancashire Society and Balmain Caledonians. The pattern of a large number of small clubs also went hand in hand with the desirability of local competitions. The greater the number of clubs in an area the easier it was to regionalise the various grades and divisions of teams. Players preferred to travel as little as possible, particularly when walking was frequently the only mode of transport available.

The pattern of soccer on the coalfields was particularly affected by the 11-day fortnight worked by miners before 1916. Having to work one Saturday in two, the miners were forced to organise their football on a fortnightly basis. From late August 1914 there were some games held on 'back' Saturdays which involved all-aged players, but these were only possible because certain miners were on strike. In campaigning to have the Saturday afternoon shift abolished, the miners had closed the five collieries on the Newcastle coalfields. They remained on strike until 17 March 1915 when mine proprietors agreed to the strikers' demands.

The 11-day fortnight also led to the extension of the normal football season. Despite the heat of summer, it was not unusual for Cup and premiership finals to be played in mid-November. The miners' love of soccer underwrote such devotion to the game but the circumstances were forced on Association officials by the coalminers' pattern of work. By way of contrast, the Northern Rugby

Football Union and Northern Rugby Football League conducted weekly competitions which always finished in early September.

Miners were no strangers to the drinking traditions of the publican's house. It was not unknown for them to spend long weekend hours in hotels, nor were they unknown to indulge in a quick ale after work. The many soccer enthusiasts among the miners were similarly consistent patrons of the 'local' and were no doubt glad of the 11pm closing time that existed before 1916. Even after this date the hotel continued to serve as the meeting place for Newcastle District footballers. It was a town's main social focus, particularly in rural areas where a pub on every corner had been a typical sight for many long years. Moreover, the 'local' provided the right type of atmosphere that footballers have traditionally sought. Bob Power, in his Saga of the Western Men, has described this well.

> In a dungeon beneath the Rotunda [hotel] lighting was provided by lamps. The smell of kerosene and training oil with the added twang [sic] of tobacco smoke made the old training headquarters a warm spot on cold winter nights and a favourite place for local gossip and the usual storytelling of games lost and won ...

In essence, the players' favourite haunt was like the 19th hole of golf. With beer as the leading attraction, the players held their regular member meetings in the pub and frequently had club rooms set aside for their regular use. As well, it was the usual custom to dine and entertain the visiting team once the Saturday afternoon's match was over. With the hotel frequently the only place in town where large numbers could literally be catered for, it was not surprising that sporting clubs used them instead of church halls, Schools of Arts and Mechanics Institutes.

The players and clubs made practical use of the hotels in other ways. Many times the most available paddock for use as a playing field was next to and sometimes owned by the hotel.

For example, the Broadmeadows ground, opposite the Premier Hotel, was used by the Broadmeadow club from 1895. Originally, the hotel proprietor, Thomas Williams, had paid for the ground's improvements. Blackburn's Oval was named after its owner, Edward Blackburn, publican at the Merewether Hotel 1907–08.

Upon the hotel being bought by John V. Coogan, the oval became known as Coogan's ground in 1909 and 1910. By 1913 it had reverted to its original name and it remained that way even when Edward McDonald took over the Merewether Hotel in 1916. Aside from their proximity for the evening dinner, grounds such as Broadmeadow and Blackburn were used because they frequently offered the only public changing and dressing facilities in the vicinity. A field elsewhere may have been more suitable to play on but it was a rare ground for soccer, as for most sports on the coalfields, that had a pavilion or even a shed for the players' convenience.

Of course the publican's field, or that of some private individual – in 1908 Minmi used a paddock belonging to a fruiterer – was entirely open to spectators. There was no concern for charging admission to watch: the players' enjoyment and participation were all that mattered. This was true even at first-grade level where, with few exceptions, the only regular occasions of paid admissions before World War I were premiership and Cup finals staged at Broadmeadow Agricultural Ground, later known as the Newcastle Showground. Admittedly, enclosed grounds on the coalfields were not numerous but it would seem there was little pressure exerted on local aldermen to increase the number. That pressure could have been applied is obvious. Miners made up the soccer clubs and, in their own communities, controlled local municipal officials.

OFFICIALS

The clubs Adamstown Rosebuds, Wallsend and West Wallsend were prominent throughout the period 1900–22. A combined total of 111 of their officials were reported in the *Newcastle Morning Herald*

for the same years. This does not include all the clubs' officials but it is a sufficiently large survey to show a general pattern. Out of the 111, the job occupations of 92 were confirmed by electoral rolls. In each club, there was an absence of professional and white-collar workers, especially at West Wallsend where 22 of the club's 25 officials were employed in the mines.



The West Wallsend team which won the Gardiner Cup, a NSW state-wide knock-out cup, in 1900 and 1901.

In 1906 there were 35 club secretaries affiliated to the Northern British FA. Twenty-six were traceable via electoral rolls, 19 of whom worked in the mines and of these only one, an under-colliery manager and probably an ex-miner, had managerial experience. The other seven club secretaries were two labourers, one carpenter, one store keeper, a tailor, a clerk and a school teacher. Secretaries, upon whom most of the administrative work fell, were as working

class as the players they organised.

Of course there were more officials elected than the secretary. Vice presidents were regularly appointed to aid in the club's administration and quite frequently as many as up to nine served in the one year. Aside from being given recognition as club stalwarts, the vice presidents were needed when the club was short of money, favours or stamp-licking, shirt-washing workers. They commonly served on the management committee and as such were devoted spade workers for the club. Like the secretary, the majority of vice presidents were also not organisers by profession. Most were from the mine or were sometimes drawn from the local storekeepers, for example, tailors, bootmakers, butchers and bakers. A few publicans were honoured, too, for their help in providing meeting rooms and dinners.

Frequently, the positions of club patron and president were filled by local members of parliament, mayors and aldermen. A good number of schoolmasters, publicans and even doctors held the prestigious positions. However, the majority of such men had neither the time nor, it seems, the dedication to be of significant help. They were available for presentation nights but little else and, if their positions were originally not meant to be nominal, they eventually became so. The end result was that the club secretary and his management committee seem to have rarely had the benefit of their patron's or president's leadership. Only the publicans, as will be seen later, took any active interest in the club's proceedings and there were self-serving motives for that.

Yet perhaps this view is somewhat inverted. Certainly those elected as patrons and presidents had professional skills of management but that may not have been the reason for electing them. The large number of politicians recruited as patrons were frequently ex-miners and nearly always Labor Party men.

Most notable were the Members of the Legislative Assembly John Estell, Alfred Edden, Arthur Griffith, William Grahame, Matthew Charlton (later Member of the House of Representatives and leader of the Opposition), David Watkins (government Whip) and William

J. Ellis, Mayor of Newcastle. They were the workers' representatives so it was natural to honour them with prominent positions. Moreover, it must have been realised that parliamentarians and trade union leaders, for example Peter Bowling, were busy men with limited time to chair a sporting club's meeting.

Eight men held the position of Association secretary between 1900 and 1914. Six were coalminers. The exceptions were a weighman in 1911 and a warehouse assistant in 1912 and 1913. The latter was Thomas Henry Estell, son of John Estell, a coalminer by profession. Association presidents were a mixture with three miners, two publicans, one school teacher, one weighman, a carrier and the trade union leader Peter Bowling, who in 1887 had played with the Greta Bluebells.

Association patrons were a more homogeneous group, numbering among their ranks a land owner, stipendiary magistrate, merchant, dyer and parliamentarian John Estell during the years his son was involved with the Wallsend and Plattsburg British FA. The composition of Association officials was therefore very similar to club officials up to the formation of the Northern District British FA.

The occupations of rugby union club secretaries and officials of the Northern [Newcastle] Branch of the NSW Rugby Football Union were surveyed. The secretaries' names were gleaned from the *Newcastle Morning Herald* and *Rugby Annual*. The time span chosen was 1900–10 and 27 secretaries were recorded. This represents a majority of secretaries and the only clubs not represented in the survey are Adamstown, Cardiff, Killingworth, Mayfield (all from 1906), Rhondda (1902) and Tighe's Hill (1900).

Of the 77 secretaries, 53 were found in electoral rolls and of these about half were white-collar workers or small businessmen. A further 23% were drawn from skilled tradesmen. Of the nine miners who were secretaries, eight held office for just one or two years and only one of the nine served a club which had more than two teams in any one season.

The names of the officials of the Northern Branch of the NSW Rugby Football Union were likewise gleaned from the *Newcastle*

Morning Herald and *Rugby Annual*. All presidents, secretaries and treasurers 1900–14 are recorded. This period was chosen because official rugby union competitions were closed during 1915–18 and, from 1919, *Rugby Annual* failed to list the country Rugby Unions affiliated to the NSW Rugby Football Union, including the names of country Union officials.

Union officials were drawn from higher professional ranks than those who were elected club secretaries. The only time when this did not seem obvious was with Edwin W. Paton and Albert H. Hough. Paton, Union treasurer 1904–06, was listed as a clerk in electoral rolls when in fact he was the Deputy United States Consul in Newcastle. Hough, Union treasurer 1907–10, was listed as an agent when he was the Newcastle manager of the North Coast Steam Navigation Co Ltd.

The survey of rugby union officials contrasts vividly with that of soccer club officials. Union often drew upon men with professional experience of management and a majority of the game's administrators were middle class. On the other hand, soccer's officials were mostly recruited from among coalminers and were thoroughly working class. When the Northern Branch of the NSW Rugby Football Union held its regular meetings the venue was the Newcastle Chamber of Commerce. When soccer held its Association meetings they were in the back rooms of hotels located near Newcastle's central railway station.

In 1914 the Northern District British FA was formed with David Thomas Johnston its first secretary. The son of a miner, he hailed from Holmesville and lived at Cardiff. Listed in electoral rolls as a clerk, he was more used to office work and the machinery of organisations than the typical miner–secretary. He went on to become an elected councillor to the Lake Macquarie Shire Council 1925–28 and 1931–47. Johnston's successor as Association secretary was Edward Masterson of Hamilton. A school teacher at Wickham who also taught trade mathematics at Newcastle, Masterson took over in 1916 but lasted for only one year. He nevertheless trained an assistant, Larry Brew Tamlyn, to become secretary in 1917.

Tamlyn was English, originally from Cheshire. A chemist by profession, he lived at Cook's Hill, an inner suburb of Newcastle not known for its allegiance to soccer. Tamlyn was married but had no children. He remained Association secretary from 1917 to February 1921 when he relinquished his position to William Watkin Roberts. A clerk in the Railways department, who lived at Hamilton, Roberts was forced to resign due to ill-health two months later and Tamlyn resumed the secretaryship. He was re-elected in 1922 but once again stepped down at the season's end. In February 1921 he had been elected the Northern District British FA's first life member in lieu of his 'strenuous efforts' for soccer.

Association presidents during Johnston's and Masterson's terms as secretary included a miner, a weighman and a boilermaker. However, with Tamlyn's initial election Robert Bell Martin was appointed to the Association chair. A Scot recently arrived from Britain, Martin had served as secretary/treasurer of the St Leonards club and, acting as the club's representative, had sat on the Scottish Football League committee. He quickly involved himself with Newcastle soccer affairs, particularly with the Newcastle United club which formed in 1915.

Martin lived at Merewether, by then a subdivided residential suburb no longer a centre for mining. He was the Newcastle manager of the sporting goods firm Mick Simmons Ltd and would have been responsible for the Company's involvement in soccer. In ways which would have served Mick Simmons as well, the Company supplied free all programmes at first-grade matches in 1914, 1915 and probably later. Footballs were also donated and in 1920 a 'Mick Simmons Cup' for the Northern District British FA's under-18s competition was represented.

Martin resigned at the end of 1920 and was replaced by John Henry Bloomfield. An active member of the Adamstown Rosebuds, Bloomfield had been the club's president from at least 1918. He was a primary school teacher who had taught all around the State before arriving at Charlestown in 1916. He became an alderman on Adamstown Council. He was an active and diligent

president, serving on Association sub-committees and resigning as Adamstown's president, lest there was a clash of interest, when appointed Association president. He remained in the latter post until April 1923 when he resigned over a matter of principle.

Upon Tamlyn's first appointment as secretary in 1917, John McCartney was appointed as the Northern District British FA's patron. It seems the position had remained vacant 1914–16. McCartney had been president of the Northern British FA in 1903 and 1906. The owner at particular times of the Australian, Masonic and Centennial hotels, he often provided facilities for Association and club functions as well as the many dinners held by clubs for the benefit of visiting teams. He remained patron until 1921.

Hugh Connell succeeded McCartney. A school teacher by profession, Connell had been appointed to Broken Hill in 1908 but, following public statements against the mine proprietors' lockout in 1909, he was transferred to Goulburn. In 1916 he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Forces and, awarded the DSO, MC and bar, he rose to the rank of Major. Upon returning from the war he resumed teaching at Carrington and accepted the position of patron at his old club, Adamstown Rosebuds. It seems he had been the club's president when teaching at Wickham and Burwood before the war. In 1920 he became the MLA for Newcastle. In 1921, while maintaining his links with Adamstown, he agreed to become patron of the Northern District British FA.

If before 1914 soccer Associations were characterised by coalminer secretaries, plus presidents and patrons who were often nominal, the pattern changed increasingly after 1914. Men whose jobs required skills of management and organisation became involved – Johnston, Martin and McCartney. Men with tertiary education were elected – Masterson, Tamlyn, Bloomfield and Connell.

It was significant that from 1917 the Northern District British FA changed its meeting venue to the Newcastle Trades Hall. The game's working-class links were left undisturbed but it was a major change from gathering each month at a convenient hotel,

particularly when a publican had been elected patron at the same time the change was made. In the sense of social composition, soccer administrators at an Association level began to appear similar to those who had traditionally administered rugby union.

NEW DIRECTIONS

Entries for competitions in 1914 numbered 41; 27 all-aged teams and 14 under-18 teams. Clubs from the south Maitland coalfields were playing with the Northern District British FA at this time. Their teams numbered 10. After a year's work, David T. Johnston and his co-workers managed to increase total entries in 1915 to 50; 37 all-aged teams and 13 under-18 teams.

South Maitland again accounted for 10, the increase coming solely from within the Newcastle District, Adamstown in particular. Among the Newcastle District schools, entries rose from 14 in 1914 to 18 in 1915. Those responsible were Edward Masterson at Wickham and John Maloney at Plattsburg Public School. Masterson was secretary of the school's soccer competitions and Maloney the president.

By the start of the 1916 season war enlistments had exacted a heavy toll on all-aged teams. By late June, when competitions finally began, there were only 10 teams spread over the three grades. Three weeks later there were only seven, and this included south Maitland teams. Edward Masterson's succession of Johnston could not have been made at a more difficult time. Nevertheless, Masterson managed to run a 10-strong under-18 competition, which included south Maitland entrants, and school competitions for 23 teams. It had been a logical step to appoint Masterson as secretary, given his experience among junior players.

Larry Tamlyn's appearance in 1917 was matched by a rise in the teams affiliated to the Northern Districts British FA. Building upon Masterson's work with local youth, Tamlyn expanded the under-18 competition, reintroduced Saturday football for under-16s and, for the first time, set up an under-12 grade.

The latter two age groups were provided by the Independent Order of Rechabites, a society originally founded to combat the 'scourge of liquor'. Rechabite lodges had fielded under-16 teams in 1910, 1911 and 1912 but in 1917, under Percy James Shepperd, a salesman from Hamilton, they moved to cater for even younger players. Whether Tamlyn approached Shepperd from the outset is unknown but it well suited the latter to organise soccer competitions for the Northern District British FA.

Vigorous sport like football was in line with his Order's idea of healthy bodies and clean minds. Eventually, 16 teams were organised by the Rechabites in 1917 and, coupled with 18 entrants in the under-18s, provided Tamlyn with an excellent nursery through which to recruit players. In addition, Masterson and John Attwood, a teacher at Barnsley Public School, boosted school competitions in the same season to three grades and a total of 30 teams.

Tamlyn was intent on developing soccer. In his first year as secretary he became the columnist 'Goalie' for the *Newcastle Morning Herald*, securing from the paper a more than ample coverage of games played. Team personnel was particularly detailed, participants loving to see their names in print. Tamlyn added the personal touch by frequent and special mention of those large numbers of players who enlisted into the armed forces.

The clubs West Wallsend and Merewether were the most often cited, West Wallsend by April 1917 having 44 players 'at the front' and Merewether by November more than 70 on its 'roll of honour' board. Any player or ex-official decorated, wounded or killed was mentioned, along with the club he played for, the position he played, and whether he had represented Newcastle and/or NSW. Tamlyn also responded to mail from soldiers at the front. News of home developments was regularly sent to the troops and it would seem this attention to detail won a lot of friends among many soldiers and their families: player and public response to soccer after the war was unprecedented.

Yet Tamlyn did not confine himself to the *Newcastle Morning Herald*. He also wrote on weekends for the *Newcastle Sun* and

Truth. To a degree this was in order to help himself financially – the proceeds aided him in later becoming a distributor/merchant of confectionery – but mostly Tamlyn wrote in the knowledge that to develop a game the press was needed, and good press at that.

With the return of war servicemen in 1919, Tamlyn set about planning on an ambitious scale. Believing all sports needed working capital to grow and expand, he sought to obtain an enclosed ground which, through its turnstiles, could generate large sums of money. However, he firstly needed the initial funds to gain his first ground. This was accomplished in 1919 when the Northern District British FA, breaking all records, registered a yearly income of nearly £700. The end-of-year balance was £174.16.10. Most of the £700, £585 in fact, had stemmed from just five games played at the Newcastle Showground. The Association had procured the ground for only £44.

The end-of-year balance did not stay long in the Association's bank account. In July 1920 Tamlyn persuaded club delegates to lease the so-called Tramway ground at Hamilton for three years. The ground, on the corner of Denison and Lawson streets, was part of the Tramway Terminus at Hamilton and was therefore easily accessible by transport. Before this, the only ground ever leased for an entire season by a Newcastle soccer Association was the Newcastle Showground (née Broadmeadow Agricultural Ground) in 1907, 1914 and, it seems, 1919.

Rent on the Tramway Ground was only £1 per week but the field was virtually an open paddock. A stand had to be invested in, inside fences erected and ground improvements made. All of these expenses were heavy, particularly for a game that until this time had never been financially buoyant. Yet, by the end of the 1920 season, within a matter of months, £619 was raised in gate receipts, which was enough to pay for all expenditure on the ground. When the annual balance sheet was presented for 1920 it showed total income exceeding £1,060 and a credit balance of £158.

During 1921 Tamlyn pushed ahead with the grounds idea. In August the Northern Association purchased five acres at Young

Wallsend. Half of the land's cost was paid for within seven months. Furthermore, additional improvements were made at the Tramway Ground, including 300 tons of top soil. By the end of 1921 the Association had spent more than £1,150 in the calendar year but still finished with a final credit balance of circa £200.

In 1922 tenders were called for the erection of dressing sheds and a grandstand at the Tramway Ground. It meant the debt on the ground reaching £1,200. Tenders were accepted and quickly financed by the selling of season tickets and by average gates at the ground which were 200% higher than those of 1921. At the end of the season, the Northern Association's balance sheet showed liabilities of £200 owing on the new grandstand and £37.10.0 on the Young Wallsend Ground. However, assets totalling £1,871.19.6 were listed as well.

The substantial gate receipts at the Tramway Ground came directly from Tamlyn ensuring that senior-grade fixtures were played there every week. Using modern terms, they were the 'match of the day'. Tamlyn realised that only when there was something worth seeing did the public pay to watch. In 1921 this presented the south Maitland clubs with difficulties – they were called upon to play a great majority of their games at Hamilton.

It was the start of a long series of grievances over grounds and gates between clubs based in Newcastle and south Maitland, but at that time there was little that the latter could do about it. In 1922 Tamlyn did arrange more home matches for Cessnock, Kurri Kurri and Weston, as required by a directive from the NSW Soccer FA. However, the weekly spectacle of the 'big match' remained and was reinforced by Cup ties, finals and representative games.

The growth in soccer's public appeal by the early 1920s was apparent. Pre-war premiership finals had raised circa £35 at the gate, representative matches about the same. Under Johnston in 1914 and 1915 these more than doubled and tripled, respectively. The 1916–18 seasons were war-affected but in 1919 the premiership final drew £87 (the same as for 1915), in 1920 £167, in 1921 £247.

Similar strides were made in the Kerr [knockout] Cup, the 1921

final raising £211, and by representative matches. North versus Queensland raised £217 in 1921. The exact number of people these gates represent was not recorded by the Northern District British FA and the problem is compounded by Tamlyn's and the *Newcastle Morning Herald*'s curious policy of ignoring not only the crowd size but the gate as well. Conceivably, both would have been useful tools for publicity.

One of the very few clues to spectator numbers comes from comparing a £253 gate, raised by approximately 5,500 people in Sydney (NSW versus Queensland) in 1921, with the £217 gate raised two days earlier in Newcastle when North played Queensland. The *Newcastle Morning Herald* records that the Newcastle crowd was bigger and it was only Wentworth Park's grandstand which guaranteed the Sydney game raised a larger gate. It would seem, therefore, that the best crowds at the Tramway Ground were in the vicinity of 6,000 people.

The policies of Association officials from 1914 had taken soccer from a game concerned solely with the player to one where the spectator was of great importance. Days when grounds were open and barely more than a paddock gave way to enclosed pitches equipped with grandstands. Once, it had been hard to finance end-of-year trophies but by the early 1920s individual matches were drawing £200 at the gate and Association incomes were well over £1,000 per annum.

The basic building blocks for growth had been nurseries for recruitment, hence the importance of such school teachers as Edward Masterson, access to the press and the provision of a spectacle. Without the latter it did not matter how suitable a football ground was, no one would pass through a turnstile to watch.

In August 1922 Larry Tamlyn travelled to Queensland as the manager of the NSW representative team. At a dinner in Brisbane after NSW had beaten Queensland 1-0, he was asked about soccer's state of affairs south of the border. His reply was that he expected professionalism to emerge in the next two years, especially in Newcastle.

SPONSORSHIP

Football crowds in the Newcastle District included a great percentage of men who enjoyed a drop of ale. At home games of the Adamstown Rosebuds it is said that half-time was always extended as spectators rushed the nearby Ridley's Hotel to consume a convivial beer or two. Intermission at normal matches lasts 10 minutes; at Adamstown it frequently stretched to 20.

The opening of the Tramway Ground proved a boon to the Exchange Hotel located in Denison Street, Hamilton. The pub was only 200 yards from the ground. Spectators therefore had only a short walk if they wanted a drink before or after the game. According to old-time Newcastle residents, it seems that even a short walk worked up a sizeable thirst.

Publicans were well aware of the relationship between sportsmen and drinking. They knew that footballing clientele boosted trade. Sometimes the donation of trophies or hotel facilities was made out of genuine goodwill, but the most common motive involved the thought of patronage. One outstanding case occurred in 1916. The closure of a nearby colliery near the Museum Hotel, West Wallsend had created the need for a new source of patrons. To this end, the hotel's proprietor urged the West Wallsend club to shift from its ground at West Wallsend Park to Johnston's Paddock on the fringe of town. The Paddock, later to become Johnston's Park, was right next to the hotel. Although not owned by the publican, it seems his influence with the Caledonian Coal Company, which owned the Paddock, enabled the club to gain a lease on the land.

The custom of donating trophies, rooms, dinners and the like remained as strong after World War I as before. However, with soccer's rise in popularity the game began to receive far more attention, to the point where the breweries, and not just the publicans, became involved. A good example involved the Kurri Kurri club at the end of 1922.

The club, whose first team played in the Northern District British FA's first grade, was seeking to acquire the Drill Hall area

in the centre of town for its home ground. The Chelmsford Hotel was approached for help in securing the area. Its publican at the time, Clwyd Wilson, is reputed to have offered a stake of £1,000 in aid as the Drill Hall was barely a stone's throw from his hotel. The previous August Wilson had donated twelve medals and a cup to a Kurri Kurri competition controlled by the South Maitland British FA, but he could not have financed the £1,000 stake himself. It could only have come from the brewery that supplied the Chelmsford.

Brewery involvement in soccer became obvious four years later when the Northern District British FA's lease on the Tramway Ground expired. In search of its replacement, the Association decided to buy what became known as Hobart Park at New Lambton. The ground was originally open land needing fencing, drainage, top soil and a grandstand. By itself the Association could not have raised sufficient funds even to buy the land, priced at £6,665. However, the breweries were approached and offered the sole rights to sell liquor at the ground. Eventually, Toohey's Ltd's bid of £2,128. was accepted. The length of its contract with the Association was 40 years.

Opportunities to gain on rivals also led to the breweries approaching ex-players, particularly star players, to become hotel licensees. Tommy Sinclair of West Wallsend, Billy Morgan of Adamstown and numerous others were sought to take over hotels, especially in those areas where they had become well-known personalities. Most notable among these was James Pringle, who played for Kurri Kurri immediately after the war. He later became the co-licensee of the Chelmsford Hotel with his brother-in-law, the same hotel nearest the ground used by his own club. The practice continued into the 1930s and after. Modern examples have been such well-known sporting personalities as Dick Thornett, Dawn Fraser and Arthur Beetson.

The Tooth's Brewery became especially known for the advantage it sought in employing William Maunders, who played for West Wallsend in the early 1920s. Maunders was the player of his day, a free-scoring forward for Australia and a

drawcard for spectators everywhere. His original job as a clerk in the Brewery's Newcastle office was granted solely on his footballing ability. He later transferred to the Castlemaine and Kent Brewery in George street, Sydney and eventually became Tooth's country manager. Ironically, Maunders was a teetotaller.

Soccer's direct involvement with the breweries was significant. It was a measure of the game's developing professionalism – officials were in need of financial backing – and of the game's increasing popularity – Tooth's and Toohey's smelt profit. The reason for cooperation was mutual interest, and always had been.

Yet, where in the past sponsorship was confined to the individual publican and was therefore small, even collectively, by the 1920s there was brewery sponsorship as well, boosting enormously the amount of liquor trade money in the game. Of course a return was expected on the capital outlay but this seemed assured given the directions in which men like Larry Tamlyn were taking soccer.

During the period 1900–22 soccer in the Newcastle District underwent significant change. Up to 1914 it was limited to what could be called 'social' football. Those involved were not concerned with building empires or anything other than enjoying kicking a ball around with a few mates. If some did aspire to greater things they were too few in number to alter anything significantly. Players were what mattered.

After 1914 social footballers remained, and grew even more numerous, but Association officials progressively introduced a new approach to the game. It was based on ambition: its aim was to boost soccer's popularity. Following a path towards professionalism, the game pursued the spectator in addition to the player. By the end of 1922, when Tamlyn stepped down as Association secretary, a professional layer had been laid on soccer's amateur base.


Arrive
alive

GETTING TO KNOW LYALL GORMAN

JOHN DAVIDSON

AT A GALA EVENT IN APRIL 2015 AT SYDNEY'S AUSTRALIAN National Maritime Museum, the Professional Footballers Australia revealed its A-League Team of the Decade. Most of the names came as little surprise to the crowd assembled – Kevin Muscat in defence, Carlos Hernandez and Thomas Broich in midfield, Archie Thompson, Besart Berisha and Shane Smeltz in attack. Ange Postecoglou was named as coach, while Strebre Delovski was given the honour of best referee. There was no standout administrator or executive in the competition's short history named on that Monday night, but if there had of been, Lyall Gorman surely would have been in the running.

Over the 10 seasons of the A-League few have made a bigger impact off the field than the Sydneysider. From his time setting up the Mariners, to his short stint running the competition at Oxford Street and his role in launching Western Sydney Wanderers, Gorman has played a starring role in the A-League's evolution. He helped build the foundations for a successful club on the Central Coast before he jumped ship to join Football Federation Australia, charged with heading up the A-League at one of the toughest times in its existence.

In 2012, he was handpicked to drive the formation of the

Wanderers, helping create what would quickly become the darling of the Australian sporting scene. And then in June 2014, Gorman was gone. With Western Sydney sold to new owners, he switched to rugby league as group chief executive of the National Rugby League side Cronulla Sharks.

He might have left the sport, but as a football administrator, Lyall Gorman continues to generate differing opinions. Was he an outright success, a brilliant business operator who expertly laid the foundations for two strong A-League clubs and intrinsically understood the deeper machinations of the game? Or was he just lucky – someone who relied heavily on the abilities of others and who was found out in his time at FFA as being out of his depth, lacking real leadership and foresight?

The truth is somewhere in between. Gorman was neither visionary nor a pariah. He did a vital job in helping a fledgling competition grow exponentially from an unstable beginning, but he also made a lot of money in the process. An intelligent and shrewd operator with a strong work ethic, Gorman has done well out of football but football has also done well out of him.

The Lyall Gorman story begins in Bankstown in Sydney's west. The son of a policeman and a working mother, Gorman grew up in a family where the value of hard work was strongly valued. Sport was always part of his life and he played football, cricket and rugby league at an amateur level. He completed a degree in education from the University of NSW before taking on a Teacher's College scholarship in Lismore. Later he would complete a masters with a major in finance, marketing, organisational culture and change.

Gorman would spend nearly 20 years working in the NSW schools system, including a 10-year stint as a consultant for the private education sector. He served as the inaugural CEO of the NSW Combined Independent Schools Sports Council, the largest private school sporting infrastructure in Australia, and sat on several high-level committees and boards.

Gorman moved into the business world in 2001 as the executive director of a small merchant bank. The ASX-listed company, which focused on corporate finance and advice, was how he first came into contact with the A-League. A director on the board of that company was part the successful tender for the Central Coast Mariners licence, but was short of funds just as the FFA was ready to announce the winning bid in November 2004. Mostly by chance, Gorman became involved when the funds dried up.

'I got a phone call from this director saying we had a bit of a problem,' Gorman tells *Leopold Method*. 'I said, "What do you mean we?"' The bid team was short a quarter of a million dollars. 'I rang my wife and said do we have any money lying around? She got together the $250,000 and the FFA issued the one share in my name for the club.' From out of the sporting wilderness, Gorman had dipped his toe in professional football's waters. Considering the shaky financial ground that the National Soccer League had previously been built on, it was a risky move.

The Mariners foundation coach, Lawrie McKinna, remembers meeting Gorman for the first time on Melbourne Cup Day, 2004. He didn't have a clue who he was, having dealt with the original members of the bid for seven months. 'I saw him on the TV and said "who's he?" ... We hit it off straight away.'

Gorman put in the initial seed money to get the Mariners off the ground. He quickly became hooked, and his involvement in the club grew steadily as he became the inaugural CEO and then executive chairman. 'I just went around the Central Coast and tried to find out what the demographics were, who the key influencers were, who the key stakeholders were,' he says. 'The only people I knew up there were my mum and dad, believe it or not, who lived up there.'

He tells *Leopold Method* the initial funds were given as a loan, but he decided to back the club and the competition all the way. 'I saw the potential of the league, I saw the potential of the Mariners,' he says. 'It's been of the most successful clubs in the A-League in one of the smallest markets in the A-League. The cash was initially

put across as a loan with the FFA. There was the backing with a commitment that over time it would come back. But once we got heavily involved, we brought new partners in, it became a journey that was too compelling.'

McKinna and Ian Ferguson, who had worked together at NSL side Northern Spirit, went to work putting the Mariners squad together. 'Lyall was a great front man,' McKinna says. 'He spoke well, he was doing the rounds on the Coast, he spoke at every event to try and get support the club.' Soon after John McKay, a former CEO of NSW Rugby, was recruited as the club's first chief executive.

McKinna, Gorman and McKay would serve together as a dream team as head coach, executive chairman and CEO. In the smallest market in the A-League, and with limited financial resources, the Mariners became a success on and off the pitch. They took out the pre-season Challenge Cup in 2005, finished third in the 2005–06 regular season and reached the competition's first-ever grand final.

The following campaign the Mariners finished sixth, out of the running of the finals, but their attendances grew. In 2007–08 Central Coast had an the fourth highest average home crowd of 15,237 fans, won the premiership, qualified for the Asian Champions League and made it to another grand final. The Mariners engaged heavily with the community and established a strong club culture. 'We got this massive momentum going and we were the highest sponsored club in the A-League at the time,' Gorman says.

According to former FFA staffer Bonita Mersiades, his mantra was always about building a club rather than a team. 'The success of both those clubs [the Mariners and Wanderers] shows that he did that very, very well. In the early days of the A-League Central Coast Mariners punched well above its weight. In many ways that started to unravel when Lyall left.'

A region that historically had no strong association with

football, and that had largely been neglected by other codes, had been empowered. Today the Mariners struggle to attract strong crowds, continue to lose money and are coming off a dire season in terms of results, but in the early phase of the A-League the club become the competition's model for community engagement and interaction.

Resources were still stretched in those days but Central Coast was effective with what little they had and at times innovative with in planning. They brought back famed Socceroos Tony Vidmar, John Aloisi and Mark Bosnich.

Opinion remains divided on exactly how essential Gorman's role was in the launch and achievement of the Mariners' early success. McKinna says the positions at the club in the beginning were perfectly separated, with each individual focused clearly on their particular role. 'Lyall never interfered from a football point of view, I handled all of the football, the signings, the contracts, John McKay did the salary cap.'

'In Lawrie McKinna and myself he had great support,' says McKay, who left the Mariners in 2013. 'In all success stories you are only as good as the people around you. They make you great despite success having a thousand fathers, but if your lieutenants are no good than in failure you become an orphan.'

A skilled networker, Gorman managed to build contacts and attract support and investment for the Mariners from both business and government sectors. The club's brand soared and against the odds it was one of the early leaders of the new completion.

Gorman helped bring in Peter Turnbull to the club, as a director and chairman, after he left Sydney FC in 2007. He also was key in the appointment of Graham Arnold as McKinna's replacement as first-team coach in 2010. Arnold would build on McKinna's tenure as head coach and under him the Mariners would claim another premiership in 2011–12, reaching another grand final that season, and then go on to win its first A-League grand final in 2013. 'Lyall was instrumental in getting Arnie to the club,' McKinna says.

Football agent Tony Rallis has dealt with Gorman often since

the inception of the A-League. Rallis says the combination of McKinna, McKay and Gorman was a great cocktail mix that lead to success at the Mariners, and feels all three deserve praise. 'There's no doubt in mind that he was a significant stakeholder in the successful establishment of a regional club like the Mariners,' he says. 'What they did was nothing short of a miracle. It was the bean-counter in John McKay, the persona of Lawrie McKinna and Lyall's unbelievable work ethic that drove it. Lyall on his own couldn't achieve it.'

In May 2010 Gorman left Central Coast to join FFA as the head of the A-League. There he succeeded Archie Fraser, who had resigned from his position of head of operations amid mounting problems and instability with Gold Coast United and North Queensland Fury. 'He will be a valuable support to me as we continue the A-League expansion program and plan for a fantastic sixth season of our national competition,' said FFA chief executive, Ben Buckley, at the time. 'Having been involved in the A-League from the beginning, Lyall understands what it is like to manage a club at the coal face.'

According to Gorman, he was seen as a voice of reason when he made the move. 'I guess at the time the relationship between the FFA and the private equity owners was not as strong as they hope it would be,' he says. 'I tried to help stabilise it, review it, refresh it, consolidate the relationships between the central body and clubland. I had a couple of challenging but exciting years in there, and again I think we were able to put in place the building blocks that really help take the A-League to where it is today.'

Some, however, were surprised with his appointment. One influential journalist described the Mariners executive chairman as a 'left-field choice' to head the competition.

Gorman would spend just two years at the governing body but they would be the most difficult of his sporting administrative career, and arguably the most troublesome for the A-League. The competition had lost some of its shine and was experiencing severe

growing pains. FFA was forced to take over the Fury and eventually the club would go under in 2011 when it declined to financially support the club. Gold Coast followed it on the scrapheap a year later, when the licence of owner Clive Palmer was revoked after a messy and protracted public battle. With the failure of the 2022 World Cup bid and the collapse of two A-League sides in less than year, football in Australia was in a dire position.

Rabieh Krayem was the CEO of the Fury when it was axed. Krayem, who is now a director of the reborn Northern Fury, which hopes to join the A-League one day, dealt extensively with Gorman and FFA's hierarchy. He describes the administrator as a supporter of the Fury at the time. 'Lyall saw the merits that was required. If he was the sole decision-maker, the Fury would probably still be here. A lot of the decision-making processes for the Fury went back to the finance people.' Others believe Gorman was simply a figurehead at Oxford Street, with little power or say in the actual running of the competition. 'He was just a yes man,' says one source who was involved closely with FFA. 'He didn't have any authority. He was a nice guy but not the most creative and inspirational. People liked Lyall Gorman but never respected him.'

Gorman came under fire from several quarters for his inaction and lack of leadership in his period in charge of the A-League. Another off-field drama brewed at the beginning of 2012 when Nathan Tinker, the owner of the Newcastle Jets, threatened to hand in the licence after a dispute over the fee he paid to buy the club. In February 2012, *Herald Sun* football journalist David Davutovic penned an damning article headlined 'Memo Frank Lowy: Image-conscious Gorman has to go'. He wrote, 'Gorman seems to be more concerned about his image than making decisions … Gorman is the master of corporate speak but no amount of spin can untangle him from this mess.'

The switch from the Mariners to head office might have been a natural progression for Gorman, but it was a far from an easy one. 'It was a bit of a hiding to nothing,' says John Stensholt, who covers the business of sport for the *Financial Review*.

There's no doubt Gorman's time at FFA delivered some sizeable hits to his reputation. He was accused of a conflict of interest, as he had money tied up in the Central Coast's property development of its centre of excellence, and his wife was shareholder of the club while he was employed by FFA. Former Mariners colleague McKay believes his old boss would have been frustrated at the organisation. 'At club level you make decisions every minute of every day but at FFA you cannot make a decision without going through layer up layer before a decision is made, if it indeed it is made eventually,' McKay says. 'It is hard to be popular when owners are losing their own money and in some cases everything.'

In late February 2012, FFA revoked Palmer's licence with four games of the 2011–12 season left. Palmer responded by launching Football Australia, a breakaway organisation, four days later. The A-League had descended into high farce. Looking back on the period now, Gorman says he has remained in contact with Palmer and today the pair have a good professional relationship. Remarkable that may be to some, but unsurprising perhaps for a man who has constructed a career out of cultivating contacts and influence.

'Everyone in Australia would recognise that Clive's a remarkably intelligent man, remarkably eccentric as well in many ways,' Gorman explains. 'At the time he was investing financial dollars that no one else was prepared to do to try and give the Gold Coast a start. I think no matter where it landed you've got to respect that. It was real cash and real contribution, it was a genuine endeavour. While it didn't come to the happiest of endings for Clive, you've still got to respect that he had a go.'

Gorman's time running the A-League would see the admission of two new clubs, Melbourne Heart and Western Sydney Wanderers, and the ultimate destruction of two others. It was a time of huge drama and concern for the A-League, leaving its future in some doubt. 'You never want to go into a community and strip away a treasured asset but at the end of the day no club, no individual can be bigger than the game,' he says. 'You have to make hard

decisions for the betterment of the game at the time.'

Yet despite the upheaval, Gorman has no regrets on the removal of Gold Coast or North Queensland. 'Looking back, the two decisions to bring to an end, at that time, the licences of Gold Coast and North Queensland, was strategic. They were well thought out. They weren't done with the thought that you burn bridges and the door's closed forever.'

The establishment of the Western Sydney Wanderers in April 2012 brought the A-League back to 10 teams and re-established a link with football's heartland in Australia. The arrival of the Wanderers proved to be a panacea for the whole competition. The Wanderers, along with the marquee signings of Alessandro Del Piero, Emile Heskey and the club's own Japanese playmaker Shinji Ono, created wider interest and brought in new fans. Attendances went up and TV ratings soared. Lyall Gorman, the man who had gotten the Mariners off the ground, was the Wanderers inaugural CEO.

'It was put to me by Frank Lowy that there were two game-changers in the A-League at that time, one was the new broadcast deal, and the other was the successful introduction of a new club in the west,' Gorman says. 'So that club couldn't fail, it had to be successful. At the time he said I was the only person in Australia he could entrust and deliver on it. I actually said no a couple of times, the third time we had a conversation I still remember saying to him, "What keeps you going?". He was 82 at the time. He reminded me of legacy again and unfinished business. I went home to my wife and said, "What have we got to lose, let's give it a run."'

In many ways, Gorman and the Wanderers were a match made in heaven. The boy from Bankstown was home. 'I knew and understood the people, the way of life, the culture. I'd been very much a part of that for many years. You just don't walk into that region and say "here we are", you've got to re-engage and re-empower and bring them on the journey, which we did.'

Many viewed it as a perfect move for him. 'Lyall had been

successful at the Mariners for five, six years,' McKinna says. 'He'd been through hard times at the FFA and done his job. It wasn't as though he'd done anything wrong but I don't know if he achieved too much when he was there. It was just like keeping it afloat. It was ideal move to move him in. He's a good talker, a good networker and obviously, being at the Mariners he made a lot of friends in high places. And when he was at the FFA he continued that.'

Gorman set about implementing the lessons he learned in Gosford and employing a similar model that he had employed with the Mariners, albeit with stronger financial backing. In April 2012 the Federal Government announced an $8 million investment in football in western Sydney. Fan forums were held and communities were engaged. Sponsors were enticed and a strong coach, with a background in 'old soccer' and a solid reputation, was appointed. An effective chief executive, with experience in the A-League, was also brought in.

McKay sees the same pattern with the Wanderers as was in play with the Mariners at their inception. 'A blank sheet of paper and community focus, except different colours and a much bigger market and potential from both on and off the field. Four million in western Sydney to 300,000 on the Central Coast. Lyall was a perfect fit for their start-up and did a great job. Western Sydney Wanderers was a no-brainer and should have happened before the failed expansion of Fury and Gold Coast United.'

The fairytale run of the Wanderers in their first two seasons is well known. Under rookie coach Tony Popovic the club won the premiership in its debut campaign and was the runner up in season two. It reached back-to-back grand finals, unfortunately losing both by small margins, but in 2014 it claimed a feat that no other A-League or any Australian club had managed before. It defeated Al-Hilal in the final of the Asian Champions League and was crowned champions of Asia.

Off the field and the Wanderers attracted passionate support, quickly filling stadiums and raising the standards of community engagement across the competition. Blue-chip companies such

as Nike, NRMA Insurance, Telstra and McDonald's all jumped on board. Merchandise flew off the shelf. The Western Sydney Wanderers had quickly become of one of the hottest brands in Australian sport and are now only second in the A-League in terms of the amount of revenue it generates.

Again, Gorman had assembled a talented team to work with as the new club was launched. Popovic, a local of the area, quickly proved his worth as a coach while Ante Milicic, another western Sydney local, had been secured as his assistant.

Chief executive John Tsatsimas, who had spent four seasons running the Newcastle Jets, was a smart and experienced operator. The FFA parachuted its marketing and communications team, including community manager Tim Thorne, to help get the Wanderers off the ground.

Some believe the governing body would not have let the club fail and Gorman was given any and everything he needed. 'The Wanderers was always going to be a success,' a rival A-League executive tells *Leopold Method*. 'The FFA spent so much. They got it right. They had the right coach, it was FFA's money and power behind them.'

The secret of any good manager is recognising what your own weaknesses are and getting the right people in to do the right jobs. No executive or administrator can do everything, or is talented at everything. But by choosing the correct staff, and working with them, great things can potentially be achieved. Gorman is certainly a believer in this ethos.

'At the Wanderers he selected one of the most loyal, honest and most talented football executives in our country in John Tsatsimas,' Rallis says. 'I imagine Lyall had a lot to do with that process. The selection of his coach, on the basis of a strong, high work-ethic character. So he surrounded himself again with successful people, Popovic being determined to the point of being single-minded in his process of success. That's the key to Gorman's success. Do I think Gorman knows football? No. I think Gorman knows the community and he understands communities.'

Gorman has been described as a political animal and it's clear that he knows how to operate in the highest of circles. He is no shrinking violet. He was able to secure government and council funding for the Mariners' projects and attract high-profile individuals to support the club. He's been sounded out for a career in politics, telling Western Sydney Business Access that he wouldn't rule it out in the future. 'I've got the belief and the confidence; I could have been a good politician.'

Whether he can be classed as a man of action or not, Gorman remains a solid media performer with great people skills. 'You cut through the bullshit – as long you listen to people, you might not act on it, but as long as those people feel like they've got a voice, you've got a win,' McKinna believes. 'I think Lyall did that every well. He made the western suburbs people feel like part of the club. And you look now they're at the bottom of the league and they're still getting 10, 12,000 people turning up in the pissing rain.'

In June 2014 Gorman left the Wanderers as the club was sold to a consortium led by Paul Lederer. 'The job was done,' he says. 'I'm still a member of the club. I still get to the games where I can. There's some unfinished business but in the broader scheme of sport when ownerships change, mindsets change. Nothing's ever permanent. I don't think I've finished with football in any shape or form.'

It is believed Gorman received a share of the sale price of the club, reported to be around $1 million. It is figure that may surprise many football fans, but follows a trend of executives receiving handsome financial rewards from the game. 'He was asked to do a job, and negotiated a bonus, and it worked,' Stensholt explains. 'And he ticked all the boxes and got his bonus. Hey, that's the way it is in business.'

While he was a free agent, Gorman was linked to prestigious roles with two AFL clubs and as chief operating officer of the Australian Turf Club last year. He was in demand. But Gorman

decided on rugby league and one of the hardest challenges in Australian sport – the Cronulla Sharks.

Founded in 1967, the Sharks have never won a premiership trophy and have appeared in just three grand finals. In 2014 the club had the fourth-worst average attendance in the NRL and was ranked 11th out of 16 teams in terms of members. The Sharks were also plagued with a performance-enhancing drugs scandal, which resulted in bans for its head coach and several players, and had no major sponsor. Famously rugby league coach Jack Gibson once said waiting for Cronulla to win a premiership is like 'leaving the porch light on for Harold Holt'.

Gorman has jumped into the role with gusto. The legendary early-riser has plenty on his plate to tackle. 'If someone doesn't do the hard things, who's going to do them?' he says. 'I'll have a crack. You can't guarantee success every time but if you get good people around you, you get absolute clarity of vision, values and culture, and you maintain a consistent application of that and you engage with communities and your key stakeholders, you can do something special.'

One of the first statements Gorman made after accepting the position as Cronulla's group CEO, which puts him in charge of the NRL club, the licensed club, Remondis Stadium and the Sharks' property development, was the possibility of a new A-League club based in the Cronulla-Sutherland region. It garnered headlines and media interest, showing that he hasn't lost his touch at generating publicity. Most recently the talk of a third Sydney side has grown and FFA is clearly exploring this opportunity. The decision to not give Wellington Phoenix a 10-year licence, opening the path for another Sydney team, has led to uproar across the competition.

He may be out of football professionally but he still keeps an eye on the game. It is the sport where he made his name, where he formed his reputation and where he came into prominence as a national figure. Gorman has a five-year contract with the Sharks but can see a return to football one day. 'Would you ever say no to a game you love? To an environment you love? I don't know where it

is right now, but nothing's forever, either way. I'm out of the game at the minute but I still support the game whenever I can.'

It is clear that Gorman is a man obsessed with community and with legacy. While he has undoubtedly received strong financial rewards from football, building something for the future is what ultimately drives him. So what is his legacy from his time in the A-League?

The answer is not straightforward. His periods at both the Mariners and Wanderers lead to the creation of successful clubs, but both have struggled of late. The Mariners' problems are well-documented as they have moved away from the community model so passionately pursued at the club's birth. The Wanderers almost picked up the wooden spoon in its third season and the club was thrown into disharmony before it competed at the Club World Cup last year, after a dispute in the prize money the players would receive for the tournament.

According to Gorman, the conflict between the Wanderers owners and the players could have been handled better. 'It would have been a 30-second conversation with me,' he says. 'It would have never had the confrontation that evolved from that particular process.' Gorman also describes the Mariners' current plight as disappointing: 'There can be nothing bigger than the club whether it's an individual, a player, a owner, a director or whatever. I'm not saying that's the case, but I can tell you how both the Wanderers and the Mariners were built on a fundamental principle of there's no greater asset than our people ... If you lose sight of that your risk the success of the business.'

Without Lyall Gorman the A-League wouldn't be the same today. Conversely, without football Gorman wouldn't be a business heavy-hitter and powerful administrator. 'Football's been very kind to him, there's no doubt about that,' Rallis says. Professional, pleasant and polite is how he has been described by some. Others have tagged the former junior goalkeeper and defender with the nickname Lyall 'Liar' Gorman, and speak of broken promises and a man with a healthy ego.

Regardless, history will remember him as an individual who made his name in the A-League with two clubs but who failed to the lead the competition effectively in its darkest days. He gave to football, but also profited immensely from it.

'It's never been about me and I think that's been one of our successes,' he says. 'It's never been any one person in those businesses I've been involved with, it's one team, we're a family together. Someone has to have a crack. The Mariners was hard, the A-League was hard, the Wanderers was hard, this job [at the Sharks] is the hardest in Australian sport. But that's OK, let's have a go and see what I can do. Never die wondering.'

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Kate Cohen is a football writer for Fox Sports and contributor for *Leopold Method*. Having previously written for *Guardian Australia*, ABC's *The Drum* and *Liverpool FC*, among others, as a freelance football writer, Kate is considered to be 'one of the brightest and sharpest young minds in Australian football' by national team manager Ange Postecoglou.

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Ian is a senior lecturer in literary studies and professional writing at Victoria University and runs the Vulgar Press, an independent Melbourne publishing company. Despite this he is also a football historian interested in the deep dark histories of the football codes (particularly association football) in Australia. In Ian's mind, if it happened after the Second World War it's too fresh in the memory to bother with.

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John Stensholt is an award-winning journalist for the *Australian Financial Review*, and edits the *BRW* Rich list. His work has also appeared in the *Age*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Financial Review Magazine*. He is also the co-author of *A-League: The Inside Story of the Tumultuous First Decade*.

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Phil Mosely has played, coached and managed, just not for Manchester United or the Sydney Wanderers. An academic historian by trade, his doctorate was followed by Ethnic Involvement in Australian Soccer and the co-edited *Sporting Immigrants*. A young, growing family and The University of Melbourne's Queen's College proved distracting but finally, upon the urgings of Ian Syson and Roy Hay, Phil decided to publish *Soccer in New South Wales, 1880–1980*, his original University of Sydney doctorate.

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John is an Australian freelance journalist living in the UK. He writes for *FourFourTwo Australia*, *Inside Sport*, *Thin White Line* and *The Roar*, and has previously worked for Fox Sports News and *AdNews* magazine. He has covered football everywhere from Hunter Stadium to the Maracanã.

ABOUT *LEOPOLD METHOD*

LEOPOLD METHOD IS A QUARTERLY PRINT PUBLICATION THAT provides intelligent, insightful analysis on Australian football.

We write the stories that mainstream media can no longer do but are so important to the development of our game. *Leopold Method* plays a leading role in bringing key issues within football to the public's attention.

As the modern game seeks to reconcile with its past, we aim to educate the football community about the game's history. *Leopold Method* is also a vital educational resource for those who are developing the players of the future.

The Quarterly Edition is more like a book than a magazine. Each issue contains over 35,000 words in single column format, along with beautiful images. Australian-based artist Jamie Osborne is commissioned to produce a pencil sketch artwork for each cover.

Leopold Method contributors are considered to be Australia's most respected journalists, academics, historians and analysts. There are stories everywhere in football and *Leopold Method*'s role is to bring them to life.



ABOUT LEOPOLD BAUMGARTNER

THOSE WHO WATCHED LEOPOLD BAUMGARTNER PLAY TALK ABOUT his skill and artistry. Those who knew him personally use the words ‘gentleman’, ‘servant’, and ‘ahead of his time’.

Baumgartner as a footballer was an entertainer at heart, a real showman. People flocked to see his sublime technical brilliance, attacking exploits, and exaggerated mannerisms.

For many of us who never witnessed Baumgartner play, or the good fortune to get to know him, our connections are through a shared passion for the sport, how it should be played, and that Australia’s football success lies in developing juniors. For those who fall under this category, who are grieving his loss, it’s his imprint on football that moves our emotions. It is an emptiness of not getting to know Baumgartner that hurts.

Born in Vienna, Austria in 1932, a child prodigy spotted at an early age, Baumgartner played for the two largest clubs in Austria – FK Rapid and FK Austria. It was during a 10-week tour of Australia and New Zealand with FK Austria in 1957 that Baumgartner fell in love with our country ‘the biggest thing on that trip was the white beaches, the sunshine, the space and the size of the houses’, he said. ‘Also, the people were so hospitable and happy.’

Post tour, and back in Vienna, a team masseur overheard a conversation between Baumgartner and fellow FK Austria player, Karl Jaros, about financial issues they were having with the club. The masseur offered to write to his Czech friend in Sydney, to see if the Sydney-based club Prague would be interested in the player's services. At the time they entertained the request, but neither of them took it seriously.

Upon receiving the letter, Prague began to chase the star pairing. A club official was dispatched to Austria to set the groundwork. Baumgartner corresponded with a contact he had in Australia. He learned that the new migrant-based Australian Soccer Federation – of which Prague was a member – had been outlawed by FIFA, so the club could avoid paying FK Austria a transfer fee.

The migrant football community in Australia wanted the game to move away from amateurism to a professional competition. Based on the experience in their homelands, the ethnic clubs knew the model had to be about entertaining the fans in order to generate sufficient revenue from gate receipts and sponsorship. They needed star players who could draw crowds. More importantly clubs wanted results.

The players left Europe with their wives, via an immigrant ship from the Italian port of Genoa, and arrived in Melbourne. From there they were flown to Sydney, where waiting for them were a group of excited supporters, anxious club officials, and media. As the players exited customs, adoring fans swarmed them, and their wives were presented with bouquets of flowers.

The remuneration and lifestyle provided by the semi-professional clubs of the 1950s and 1960s could not match the extravagance of today's modern superstars, however their intent to pamper the stars was evident. Baumgartner and Karos were provided with a six-bedroom house in Marrickville for six months. Their fridge stocked with food, chores were attended to and clothes provided.

The star pair were presented to the fans at an official function on Sydney's North Shore. Their first game was against Hakoah in front of 7,500 spectators. Prague finished fourth in 1958. However, the coverage in Austria of the star's experience in Australia would set off other players wanting a change of life, with Walter Tamanl, Andrea Shagi, Eric Schwarz and Herbert Ninaus all arriving from Austria to play with Prague for the 1959 season.

Prague won the pre-season Ampol Cup 7-0 against Auburn before going on to win the competition. Prague beat APIA in the grand final, with Baumgartner scoring two goals (32 for the season) in front of 13,000 people at Henson Park in Marrickville. That year he also represented the NSW Federation side that played against Costa Rica's Deportiva Saprissa.

Former Australian goalkeeper Ron Lord, who played in the 1959 Prague side, remembered a goal Baumgartner scored:

> 'He took one defender on and beat him, took another defender on beat him and left them behind. The goalkeeper came out and he beat the keeper and he was still reasonably well out from the goal. Taking the ball up to the goal line and had time to get down on his hands and knees and just nod the ball over with his forehead. It was sheer arrogance but artistry in the way he did it.'

The following season Baumgartner signed a contract with Canterbury, in John Gray's sports store in Kingsgrove, in Sydney's south-west. Gray got to know the Austrian star, as a stockist of Leopold Baumgartner boots.

Baumgartner was brought to Canterbury to help with the football education process for their youthful side, which was coached by 'Uncle' Joe Vlatsis. Also in the side was the Warren brothers, Johnny and Geoff, John Watkiss and current Western Sydney Wanderers' goalkeeping coach, Ron Corry. In his book *Sheilas, Wogs and Poofters*, the late, great, Johnny Warren recalled:

> 'The crowds used to love him [Baumgartner] because he was tremendously gifted with the ball and he always try to keep them entertained in return.'

Baumgartner scored 30 goals for Canterbury that year. But none was as remarkable as his goal that changed the grand final against his former team Prague, in front of a crowd of 17,872 spectators at Henson Park.

Down 2-1, Baumgartner collected the ball in his own half, beat three players, and then laid a perfect pass to Jose Amigo. The ball was then played to Geoff Warren, who cut the ball back for Baumgartner in the box, who finished what was later regarded as the goal of the season. Canterbury would go onto win the game 5-2. In describing the atmosphere, Baumgartner could be excused for poetic exaggeration:

> 'The whole crowd stood up with a tremendous roar, hats flying, papers being thrown around, jackets tossed high in the air. A jubilation went through the crowd.'

Baumgartner would only spend one season with Canterbury. He briefly signed with South Coast in 1961 as player–coach, but this would only last four games. Needing to salvage their season, APIA Leichhardt paid South Coast a transfer fee as well as four players in exchange for the Austrian star. Almost 500 fans attended his first training session, however the season was below expectations for the Italian-backed community club.

The year 1962 would be a prosperous one for Baumgartner, who was appointed coach for Sydney Croatia, NSW Federation, as well as an administration job with APIA Leichhardt. Under his coaching, NSW won the interstate competition undefeated, APIA Leichhardt made the semi-finals NSW Division 1, and Sydney Croatia won promotion from Division 2.

In the following year, 1963, the mismanagement of Baumgartner began. In late February, he was given the role of Director of Coaching in NSW. While washing his car one Friday morning, an

official who lived nearby asked Baumgartner if he would like to conduct a football camp for 100 boys. The problem was the camp was the next day. When Baumgartner arrived at the camp nothing had been organised. He had to make up most of it on the run – the programs, drills, even making sure the kids went to sleep.

Soon Baumgartner resigned as captain and coach of the NSW representative team. In a meeting with the federation, Baumgartner cited the needs of his club, and the financial impact on his family should he be injured while playing. The versions of events quoted by Baumgartner in his biography, and also in various interviews, differ from what was reported at the time. The only consistency was that Baumgartner and Leo Karos were banned for life from representative duties. 'Having proved my worth to Australian soccer, I was suspended for life,' said Baumgartner. 'What a humiliation.'

That year, APIA Leichhardt lost the grand final to South Coast at Sydney Showground. The crowd was listed at over 30,000 people, although it was reported that police had to close the ground and turn supporters away. After 20 minutes, APIA were down 3-0, and supporters began to boo their own team. Post game rumours began to circulate that Baumgartner had thrown the game. Consequently, he was hauled in front of the APIA committee, then placed on the transfer list – for a fee of £1,200.

'The committee had two factions,' said Baumgartner. 'One was Italian and the other wasn't … my interest was in soccer, not club politics. It was time to go.'

Leo Baumgartner would never again achieve the great heights of his time at Prague, Canterbury and APIA. In 1964 Hakoah had finally got the player they had been chasing for years. During this time Down Under, Baumgartner became an Australian citizen, the state federation lifted his lifetime ban, and he received his one and only representative cap for Australia. In front of a sold-out Sydney Showground, they lost 5-1 to a touring Everton team.

The marriage of powerhouse club Hakoah and Leo Baumgartner should have brought trophies, but instead it fell to pieces due to political infighting. Tired of being used as pawn, he left the club, and for a brief period it looked like he had retired as a player from the game. He left Hakoah to coach Sutherland in second division, and worked with junior clubs in the area.

Baumgartner also got the entrepreneurial urge and opened up a European restaurant, which would send his family to the brink of financial ruin. The culmination of not playing top-level football and a failed business made him want to return to Austria. Yet after just a few days in the country of his birth, he realised Australia was truly his home.

Upon returning to Australia, Baumgartner revisited his early training as an engineer, and got a job with Qantas. For financial reasons, he decided to return to top-level football with Sydney Croatia. It was a lucrative offer, and it would turn out to be his last season as a player–coach.

However, club politics continued to follow Baumgartner. After a heavy defeat against Yugal, he knew his time with the club was over. 'Things became a bit uncomfortable there when we were beaten 6-1 by Yugal, a Yugoslav club that the Croatians have always had issues with.'

By 1972 Baumgartner went back to the club he first started his Australian adventure with – Prague – and coached the team for a couple of seasons. In 1974, he had a brief stint coaching Marconi, and returned to coaching the NSW representative team.

Dave Roxby, a Western Australian Hall of Fame goalkeeper, played under Baumgartner as an over aged player during 1981, in Hakoah's youth side. 'Leo always wanted it played on the ground,' explains Roxby. 'He was very professional, and I enjoyed playing for him. He was very technical, seemed before his time. When he coached me, everything had to be played out from the back on the ground, and if you didn't, he would let you know about it.'

In the late 1980s, Baumgartner would return to Sydney Croatia as the Director of Coaching. It was during this time when Mark

Bosnich, Zeljko Kalac and Tony Popovic were coming through the youth and senior ranks.

At the end of leaving Sydney United, Baumgartner would move to Coffs Harbour on the north coast of NSW, where he lived until his final days. The game in his adopted homeland recognised him for his contribution with an Award of Distinction for outstanding service to football in 2001.

He continued with his passion in developing juniors. He won a premiership with Coffs Coast Tigers and, in 2011, was asked to coach a struggling Sawtell Scorpions. Terry Allen, writing a tribute piece for North Coast Football's website, reflects on a game Baumgartner was coaching:

> 'I once saw him pull a player off the field before half-time when one of his teams had fallen behind. The player, who clearly thought he should have been given the full game to show his wares, said something like, "But it's not even half-time yet. I'll be right." To that, Leo replied, "You've had half an hour to do that and you're crap. Now get off!"'

Baumgartner's Australian football story is a cautionary tale. He was never used to his full potential to help with the development of the sport. He had brief moments, and helped on the fringes. If Baumgartner was respected for his superior technical ability, and for his work as football educator with young players, it is a shame his impact was not as large as his talent deserved. The game has suffered as a consequence.

But for all the negatives Baumgartner experienced, he still preferred to remember the positives the game provided him. A quote from Baumgartner's autobiography *The Little Professor of Soccer* should be etched into every administrator's job description:

> 'Soccer needs juniors and it should be kept well in mind that with the juniors lies the future; not the political jealousies and personal ambitions.'

Amen to that. Thank you, Leo. You are one of the true greats to grace our football fields.

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— LEOPOLD BAUMGARTNER

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